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WORLD WRESTLING FEDERATION™

RAW

June 1999 ▪ Volume 4 ▪ Number 6

Look, Ma... I'm A Degenerate!

How the new Era of "Attitude" revolutionized the Federation and the fans!

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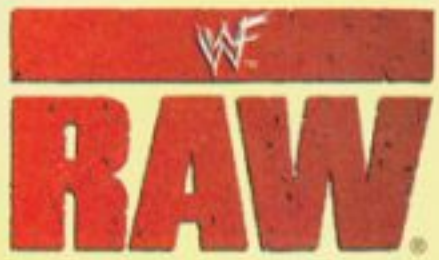

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A Commentary By Vince Russo

I Feel Like A Cheap Ho!!!

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I DON'T KNOW.

Suddenly I feel so used... so abused. Like a chick who just got dumped by some heartless stud the day after the giddy-up. You guys know what I'm talkin' about—the ol' rollover. Love 'em... leave 'em. Use them while they're fresh meat, while they're hot—then drop them off at the curb like yesterday's sports news. It's ironic... I feel no different than one of the Godfather's Hos... but at least they're gettin' paid.

In TV LAND the Godfather's corporate structure is based on the "revolving door" theory. Use the hos in one city—obtain a new batch of hos for the next. In comparison, it's kinda like the press. Use a story that's gonna get us ratings today—hype the shit out of it, spin it, spin it again, throw a little sensationalism into it, put it out there... then drop it off in the out box at the end of the day. Like a ho. The World Wrestling Federation has simply become that—a ho to the pimp... a ho to the press.

Yeah, it took me a while, but I think I finally got it. Hey, like Joe Public, I guess I was had for a while. I never "believed" the hype, but sometimes... you get caught up in it. I guess you can compare it to O.J.'s getaway in his white Ford Bronco. The world got caught up in that. The world got caught up because the media brought us along for the ride. Think about it. Al Cowlings was driving O.J. back to his house so he could surrender to the police. Why did the world get so caught up in that? I'll tell you why—because of the media "spin." We were led to believe that O.J. was possibly going to blow his brains out on national television at any minute. One word: RATINGS. Then came more ratings—the trial. Months and months of a very monotonous trial. What were we all waiting to see? Why did we watch? It's simple—media hype. In reality, the Simpson trial was more boring than watching the Los Angeles Clippers play.

The media have always been known for spinnin' hype. That's what they do. And whoever spins the most hype—that's what Americans will watch. Clinton-Lewinsky. Give me a !@#$% break!!! First of all, the President of the United States LIED to the American public. End of case. Impeach his ass. But the media? They had a field day with this. Not necessarily in "should he... or shouldn't he," but rather HOW DID HE? The gory details. THE SEX. They all wanted to talk about THE SEX. SEX GETS RATINGS. Who's gonna get Monica first? What will she tell us? Sensationalism. And, the queen got her. There she was, Barbara Wa-Wa, simply gettin' the dirt. She didn't care about me, she didn't care about you, she DEFINITELY didn't care about Monica—she simply cared about HEARIN' ABOUT THE SEX!!! As... we all did. The difference is—we admit it. What American says, "We want the news"? Answer: Very few. The average Joe—me and you—we want the dirt, and we scream for it. And the media give it to us... as much as we can choke down. Unfortunately—they will never admit that. They're news people, dammit—they have a reputation. One big, fat BULL-SHIT on that!!! Barbara Walters is no different from Howard Stern. They are both after the same thing. The only difference is that Howard admits it—he's not a pompous ass about it. He's not "above it all."

That's why so many people read the *National Enquirer*? Because people want DIRT!!! They don't mask it—they want gossip—"who's zoomin' who?" The media know that, and they deliver—but they mask it. They mask it like we're a bunch of freakin' morons. They mask it by telling us it's "newsworthy." Barbara Walters masks it by telling us "how much she cares." People... the only thing Barbara Walters cares about is her paycheck. She doesn't care about you, me or the guy working at the steel mill. She's a phony, which might explain the face work. Ever notice that? How aging newswomen appear as though they bathe in the Fountain of Youth every day? Well, they're bathin' in their marble tubs—they're gettin' cosmetic surgery to "appear" young and attractive—just as they "appear" to care about us.

The World Wrestling Federation has suddenly become the talk of the town. All of a sudden, some jack-off on *20/20* cares about the effect the World Wrestling Federation is having on "our" children. All of a sudden, Deborah Norville of *Inside Edition* is greatly concerned that the term, "Suck It," is

going to turn every kid in America into a juvenile delinquent. What a bunch of shit. Media hype in all its glory. Let's take advantage of their ratings—let's take advantage of the ratings of the World Wrestling Federation. Let's rape them. Let's use them to our advantage. Let's create controversy so WE will get ratings, so people will watch OUR show. I mean, come on—with all that is goin' on in the world—you know, a war and all—you mean to tell me that *Dateline* is more concerned with a guy by the name of "Sexual Chocolate" chokin' on a ball gag?!!! No—actually they don't give a damn about "Sexual Chocolate"—but they do care about their ratings. Today, if you mention the World Wrestling Federation on ANY show—people are watching. So, then, since they can't talk about "rasslin'"—as that's what it is to media types—they'll focus on an angle. You see, it's not just "rasslin'," it's how "rasslin'" is... the anti-Christ. It's how "rasslin'" is contaminating the youth of America. It's how little Chucky is

gonna grow up to be Charles Manson because he watches Sable bump and grind every other week!!!

The sad thing? Some people buy into this shit. If the media say it, it's gospel. If "they" say that the Godfather's hos are "dirty"... then, by God, THEY'RE DIRTY!!! Hey, again, if you want other people to tell you what's right—and what's wrong—have a blast. I'd just rather trust my honest, natural instinct than some 65-year-old anchorwoman who is only concerned with staying on top. These people aren't real. They're not us. They're egomaniacs looking for their next big story. They're pompous, arrogant asses. Has anybody ever watched *The View*? 'Nuff said.

My point? We—the World Wrestling Federation—are RAW. We are... what we are. We are entertainment looking to simply do that... entertain you. We listen to the fans. We give them what they want. WCW has decided to "do the right thing"—to do a "G-rated rasslin' program." Hell, that's what the media says they "should do." Well, here's the reality of your G-rated program. *Raw* 6.5, *Nitro* 3.1. If the people wanted a G-rated rasslin' program they'd be watchin' a G-rated rasslin' program. WCW has been sucked in by the media hype—they've been influenced—now they are suckin' wind. We are only influenced by YOU. The media can kiss my ass. The media don't know you... or care about you. We do. That's why we're honest, and that's why we're up front. WE ARE WHAT WE ARE.

All of a sudden, ESPN is doing a piece on "rasslin'"? Does anybody get that? First of all, sports-entertainment clearly isn't a sport. Is ESPN going to cover the Academy Awards next year? Hmmm? Why would ESPN do a piece—a NEGATIVE piece—on the World Wrestling Federation? Could it be because they have a working relationship with ABC and Monday Night Football? Is it because the ratings for Monday Night Football have been going down the toilet the last two years because people are watching the WORLD WRESTLING FEDERATION ON MONDAY NIGHTS? Is it in the best interests of ESPN to BURY THE WORLD WRESTLING FEDERATION? You bet your sweet bippy it is.

And to break it down even further, there are people within our own industry attempting to bury us for their own selfish reasons. You have this goofball in California who writes a "newsletter"—yeah, I want to be a "newsletter" writer when I grow up—going around talking negatively about the World Wrestling Federation to anyone in the media who will listen in a feeble attempt to gain notoriety. Well, you've succeeded. You've now gone from a blemish to a pimple on my... but what's sick about this is the fact that this guy is burying the same industry that is lining his pockets with cash!!! He is burying the man who is solely responsible for his well-being—Vince McMahon. No different from the media—ulterior motives. SELFISHNESS. RATINGS. NEWSLETTER BUYS. WATCH MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL INSTEAD!!!

So, who will win the war? General Russo says, "You, THE FANS." You want the best—you will continue to get the best. As the World Wrestling Federation army—YOU dictate to us, and we've got two words for everybody else.

So, do we retreat... or do we attack?

I say, FUEL UP THE "HOOOOO TRAIN" AND LET'S KICK THEIR CANDY ASSES!!!

Later. ■

Newcomers Beware!

In the business world, corporate espionage is commonplace. Keeping tabs on the competition is crucial to any company's success. I'm not talking wiretaps and hidden cameras either. Save that stuff for the next Tom Clancy novel. I'm talking about the perfectly legitimate practice of hiring the enemy's ex-employees.

Several months ago, Terry Taylor joined the World Wrestling Federation the day after he had resigned from World Championship Wrestling (WCW). In his third stint with the Federation, Taylor wanted to make a great impression. Among other things he recommended the hiring of The Public Enemy.

Ted Petty and Mike Durham (a/k/a Flyboy and Johnny Grunge—The Public Enemy) were courted by the Federation in 1995 following a successful stint in Extreme Championship Wrestling (ECW). The hardcore team had a try-out match before the start of the 1995 *Survivor Series*, but they eventually signed with WCW. Following the company's decision to phase out tag teams, coinciding with the expiration of their contracts, Petty and Durham felt it was time to go and subsequently left WCW.

They were jobless for no more than a minute when ECW quickly rehired them. Amid rumors of a shaky financial situation at the time of their rehire, TPE were reluctant to commit long-term to the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania–based promotion. At the same time, their friend Terry Taylor was re-joining the ranks of Titan Sports, Inc. and he put in a good word for the duo.

The Public Enemy instantly became successful in the World Wrestling Federation, right? That couldn't be more wrong. Maybe it was the established guys wanting two new faces to earn their spot or perhaps there was the perception that they were rats jumping from the sinking southern ship. Either way, The Public Enemy were apparently the victims of a freeze-out. No one on either side will admit it, but certain circumstances point toward a less than warm welcome campaign against the Flyboy and Johnny Grunge.

The first incident was a *Sunday Night Heat* match against the Acolytes. What happened in and out of the ring was nothing less than assault. There to witness the carnage at ringside was Terry Taylor, as he was commentating. It was an ass beating of biblical proportions. Nothing new for the Acolytes, who generally treat everyone harshly, but this was certainly not a basket of fruit for the new neighbor either.

The big question, however, does not involve The Public Enemy. They are merely the test case for something that will come before the Federation's court of locker room opinion many times in the next year or so. With others allegedly looking to depart from their present employers, will this chilly acceptance trend continue? Or is this a reflection on Terry Taylor personally?

The word is that Taylor never met heat he didn't like. It has been said that he speaks sometimes before thinking. Perhaps, with a number of former WCW competitors on the current roster, Taylor may have some old enemies within the Federation. Not only that, but apparently not everyone has rolled out the red carpet for the man who once portrayed the Red Rooster. Word is that the Taylor-bashers point to a lack of need. Why bring in someone from down there when things are doing so well up here? The fact is that Terry Taylor is good at what he does, and he is generally the first one to proclaim that. That sort of ego rubs folks in Titan Land the wrong way…

The Public Enemy were released by the World Wrestling Federation this past April, with the front office officially wishing them well in their future endeavors. This was a blow to Taylor. Anytime a fellow competitor is let go, the entire locker room feels it. Anyone who perceives himself as being "on the bubble" will most certainly be looking to crank it up.

The World Wrestling Federation is a tight-knit operation with everyone looking out for each other. Because of this, some of the best work ever seen has been created. Terry Taylor can be part of the story and the story writing. This is not an obituary for him, but simply the facts.

Until next month, this has been The Informer. ■

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Letters To The Editor:

E-mail

Dear Editor,

I just finished reading the "Ask the Fans" article in the April issue of *RAW Magazine*. In my opinion, that article was a long time coming. I always read these critics talking badly about the World Wrestling Federation and how it is very rude and crude. My thing is, Many of the shows on television during the same primetime hour are many times worse than anything I've ever seen on *RAW*! Personally, I feel very offended when these critics see the fans as lower forms of life. Thanks to your article, I was able to see the many ways that Vince McMahon defends not only his company, but me as a fan. Vince, I would love the chance to shake your hand for the incredible job you have done!

Juggalo@aol.com
Newington, Connecticut

E-mail

Dear Editor,

I just finished reading the "Aiming and Firing" article in the April issue of *RAW Magazine*, and I was glad you were able to show us a side of Stone Cold Steve Austin that we don't normally get to see on television. I think one of the reasons why I enjoy reading *RAW Magazine* so much is because it just isn't about wrestling anymore. You just have to respect the fact that Stone Cold can be so responsible and vocal about his love of hunting. Hopefully, you guys can do more articles on the Federation Superstars' hobbies in the future.

"Steven"
Pyro7890@aol.com

Letter

Dear Editor,

I just finished reading the April issue of *RAW Magazine*, and I was really shocked when I read the "Married to the Business" article. It was very interesting about how the superstars' lives are totally different at home and how their wives and children react to what they go through. It was especially moving to see the photos of Mick Foley being taken to the hospital and having his daughter hold his hand. In a future issue of *RAW Magazine*, I wish you could actually get a little deeper with the issues explained in the article. For example, why not have a full interview with Foley's wife?

Nick Milillo
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

E-mail

Dear Editor,

I just finished watching the March 29 *RAW IS WAR* from East Rutherford, New Jersey, and I must say that I am very shocked at the Undertaker's actions of late. If he's out to prove he really is pure evil, then I think he's done his job! I found it very uncomfortable to watch him hang the Big Boss Man at *WrestleMania* XV, and I was equally uncomfortable with what he did to Stephanie McMahon on *RAW*. Where does it all stop? Is it going to take Vince and his entire family going into hiding?

Bob Barner
Barner@yahoo.com

Letter

Dear Editor,

Thanks for doing the "I Can't Turn It Off" article in the April issue of *RAW Magazine*. As a wrestling fan for over 20 years, it's refreshing to see many of the Federation Superstars bringing a great deal of their true personalities in front of the camera. I especially found it funny how Badd Ass Billy Gunn is just as cocky in real life, or that Mark Henry really is a ladies' man! It also made me realize that sometimes the superstars can actually *become* their personas, such as is the case with Shawn Michaels or Bret Hart!

Eric Leslie
Houston, Texas

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RAGIN' ROSS!

By Jim Ross

WHAT AN ADVENTURE this journey back to work has been! One would assume that it would have been a "no brainer"—a guy gets sick, he improves and then goes back to his job. But, "Oh, hell, no!" There has to be corporate fun and games without regard for anyone's personal feelings. The blue-suit–wearing corporate butt kissers who don't have the character or courage to stand up to Mr. McMahon have led the charge to replace J.R. simply because I'm not one of them and I DO HAVE the character and convictions to disagree with our "beloved" owner. Of course, my "look" and my accent detract from the World Wrestling Federation broadcasts, according to these spineless executives. So, that's the reason that they "officially" hang their collective heads. Complete B.S.! How in the hell do these people sleep at night?! Have THEY dedicated over half their lives to this business? Will they stay in the business if and when it ever loses any of its current overwhelming, worldwide appeal? Of course not! Have they ever been paid between $25 and $40 a night as a referee, just to learn the fundamentals of this very unique genre? Please!

And, listen, I don't want any medals and I sure as hell don't want any sympathy because of my current situation. I just want the respect I think I have EARNED from more than 20 years in the business and the opportunity to go back to ringside on *RAW* and Pay-Per-Views and prove that I am the best at what I do. If I fail, then my detractors can have a good laugh and say, "I told you so." I'm ready for the challenge!

Most folks are not aware that I would not have even been considered to work at *WrestleMania* if it had not been for *Stone Cold Steve Austin*. Through a McMahon representative, Austin raised hell that I should be given a fair chance to return to my post and it should start with the Federation Championship match at *WrestleMania* XV. Not wanting to listen to *the Rattlesnake* any longer than he had to, Mr. McMahon "graciously" said yes. What a guy McMahon is! But that's another story. However, I am obligated to Stone Cold for being a stand-up son of a gun! Thanks, Rattlesnake... I owe you one big-time!

It's kind of funny. Young boys, teenagers who are dying to be considered cool to garner attention have made some very creative anti-J.R. signs. I guess the Bell's palsy folks might appreciate the publicity. I think it's pretty lame.

World Wrestling Federation ratings success must be driving Turner's resident genius even more crazy. What a suspicious lifestyle won't do, low ratings will. By the way, how many cooks are in that kitchen?

I fully expect *The Rock* to soon become one of the most popular World Wrestling Federation Superstars ever. This kid is a franchise player with class and character, not to mention he's one hell of an athlete. *The Rock* reportedly has over five years remaining on his current Federation contract. That's great news for World Wrestling Federation fans.

My gut tells me that this whole *Undertaker/McMahon* story will not have a happy ending. It certainly seems to be extremely personal.

Is there any truth to the rumor that there is some minor unrest within the *Ministry*? Stay tuned.

D'Lo Brown will someday be a major player in the Federation. He's too intelligent and too gifted an athlete not to be ultra-successful. Why hasn't someone taken advantage of this young man's skills?

Write it down—Someday very soon the *Brood*, INDIVIDUALLY, will be huge stars. All three of these unique talents have special skills and the only question, in my view, is: Who will be the biggest star of the trio? Any predictions?

Who in the world does *Goldust* think he is? Or does he not have a clue? *Dustin Runnels* needs help from where I stand, and his portly pal, *the Blue Meanie*, ain't the man to address the son of the American Dream's needs. "The Weird and the Restless"? Oh, hell, yeah!

Expect several new, young athletes to debut in the Federation in '99. Fans demand to see new faces or they change the television channels.

I hope I haven't offended too many of you with my recent antics and I sincerely appreciate your patience and support for my cause. I won't give up and, hopefully, neither will you. See you next month.
J.R.

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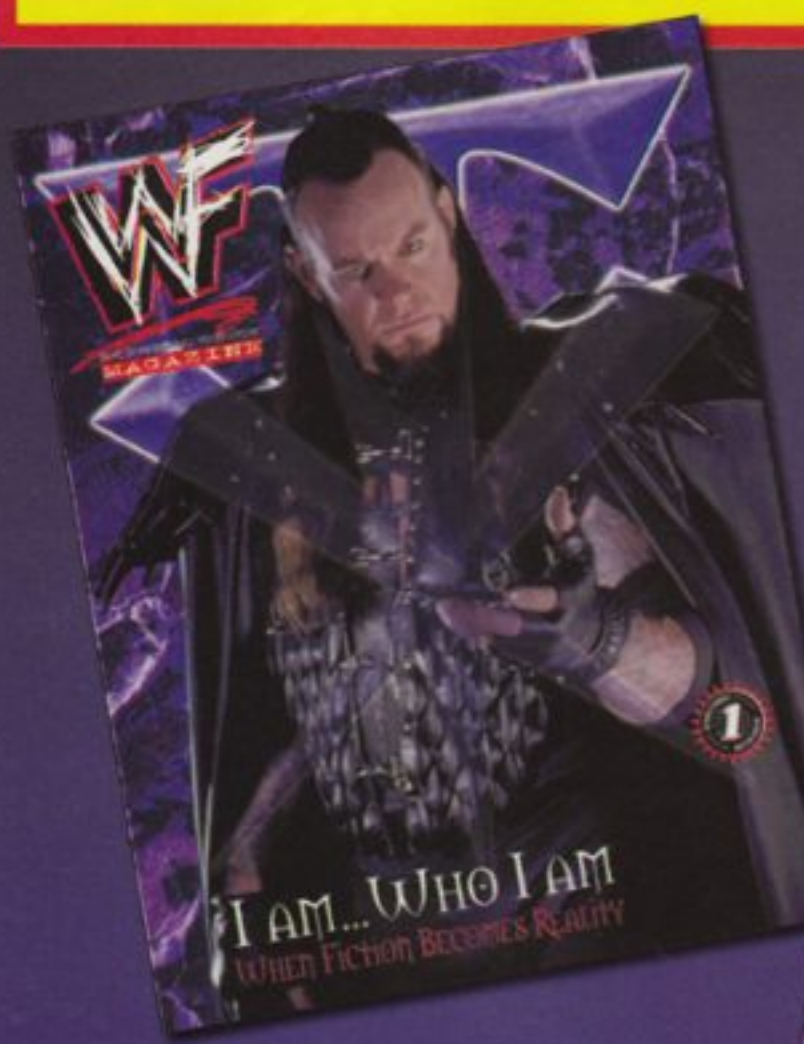

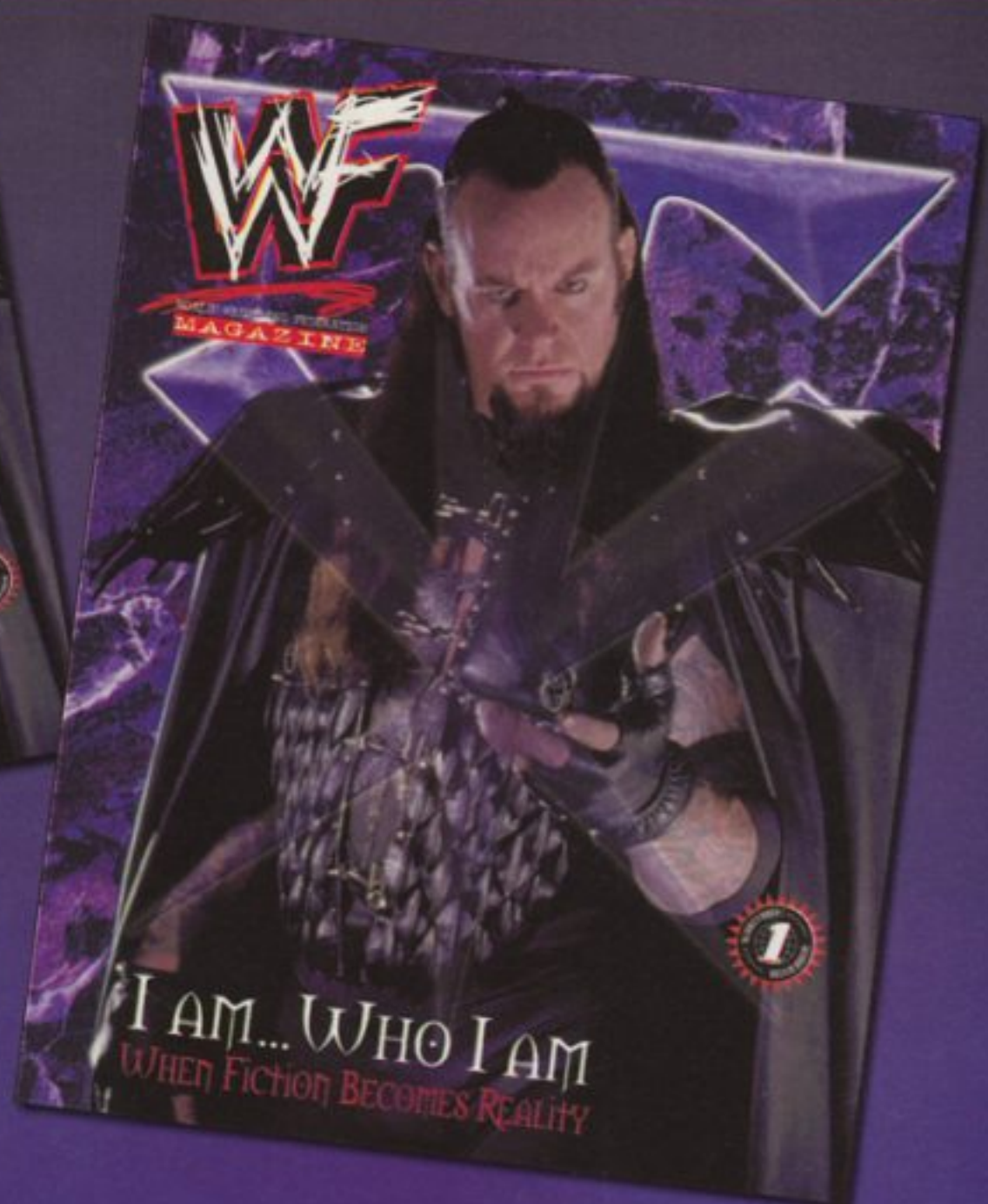

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who is the female wrestling fan?

Professional wrestling has traditionally been regarded as a sport ruled by testosterone, but in reality there is plenty of female sweat in the mix. With its ever-increasing popularity, more and more women have been tuning in and turning on to sports-entertainment.

BY LAURA

It is also now more acceptable to be a female fan of wrestling. However, the female population of the wrestling audience has gone largely unnoticed—and they are watching for more than just a glimpse of Mr. Ass's gun. The truth is that there have always been women for whom a clothesline means more than a place to hang laundry.

So, who is the female wrestling fan? Who is this woman who hangs out on Monday nights to watch *RAW* and wears Austin 3:16 T-shirts?

The 20 women I interviewed for this article ranged in age from 13 to 42 and live throughout the country—from Middletown, Rhode Island, to Sitka, Alaska, to Los Angeles, California. And these are not dumb broads. They are students, mothers, office managers, paralegals—spanning the full spectrum of careers. And last, female fans are no newcomers to the world of sports-entertainment. They've been fans for an average of 11 years, although the duration ranges from 6 months to 28 years. What is most interesting, however, is how these women were turned on to the happenings inside the squared circle.

"When I was a kid, my grandmother would spend the night at our house on Saturdays," a 33-year-old caterer

recalled. "And she would watch wrestling and then the roller derby. I would sit up with her and watch it..."

In fact, many of the women interviewed were introduced to wrestling as children through family members, many of whom were women—grandmothers, stepmothers or cousins. One woman was turned on to *RAW* by co-workers and she hasn't been able to keep away from it since. Others stumbled upon it browsing through the channels.

"It caught my eye while channel surfing a couple of times and I found myself staying to watch it, although initially I would change the channel whenever someone else came into the room. I didn't want to be caught watching it originally, but now I admit it freely."

The question is: What keeps these chicks watching? Is it because of hot Federation Superstars, such as Billy Gunn, The Rock and Stone Cold Steve Austin—guys who are in tremendous physical condition and exude sex appeal equivalent to any current movie star or male fashion model?

"The constantly changing story lines grab my attention," a student from Ohio responded. "It's like a soap opera, and I love soaps... And I must admit the good-looking guys have a little bit to do with it!"

Her sentiment was echoed by many other female fans questioned. Action and story lines are what keep these women watching. Contrary to popular opinion, beautiful male specimens alone are not enough. These women want to be entertained.

"I'm a college-educated woman, working full-time in an industry that gets more emotionally disconnected every day," a hardware/software buyer from Los Angeles explained. "Wrestling is a form of entertainment that lets me see other people act out in ways that I wish I could. I admire the superstars as performers who are serious enough to train and condition and risk their bodies in a dangerous form of entertainment, much like

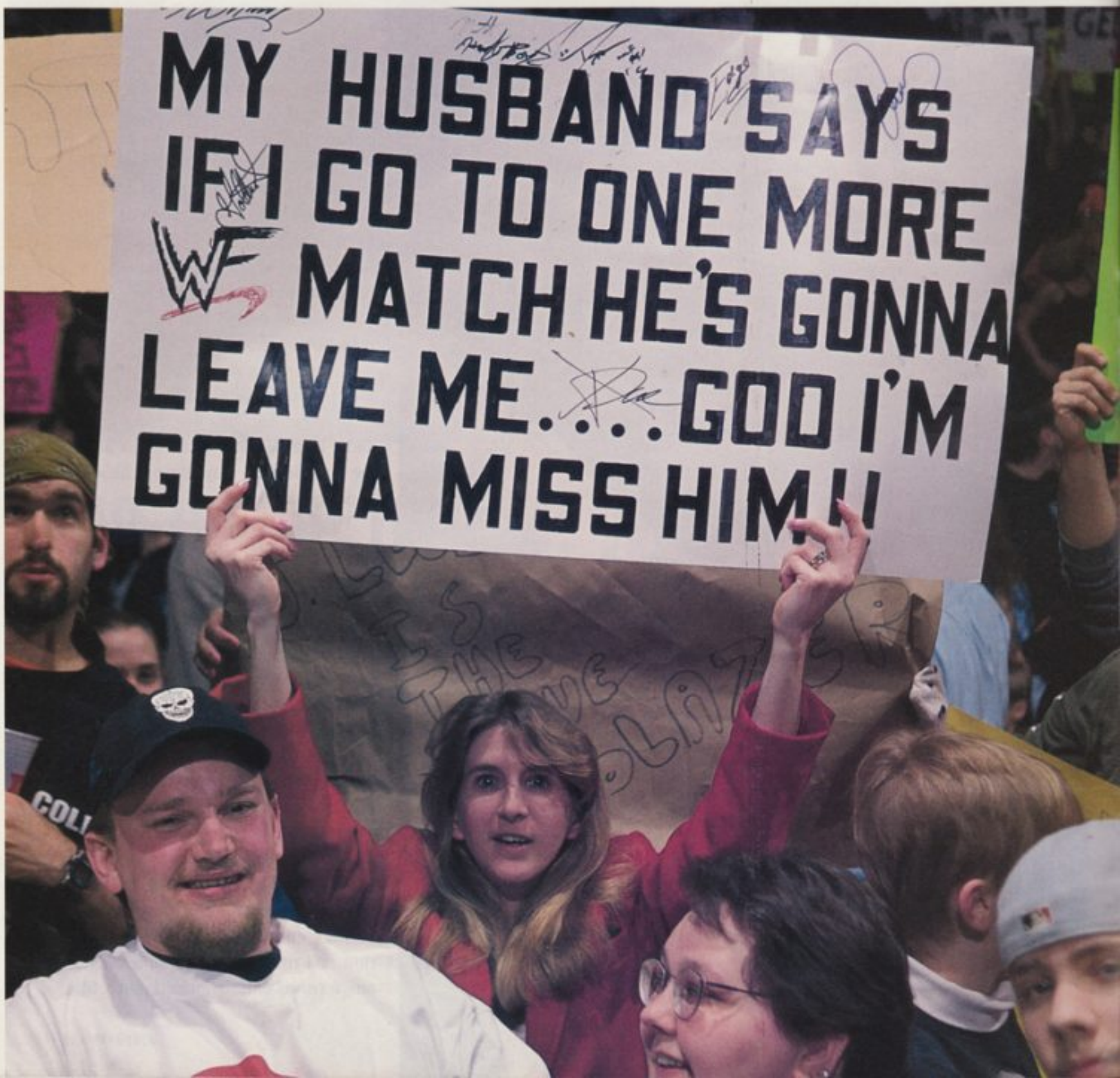
stunt men and women, and don't take themselves too seriously as characters, playing over the top and at full volume to please the crowd."

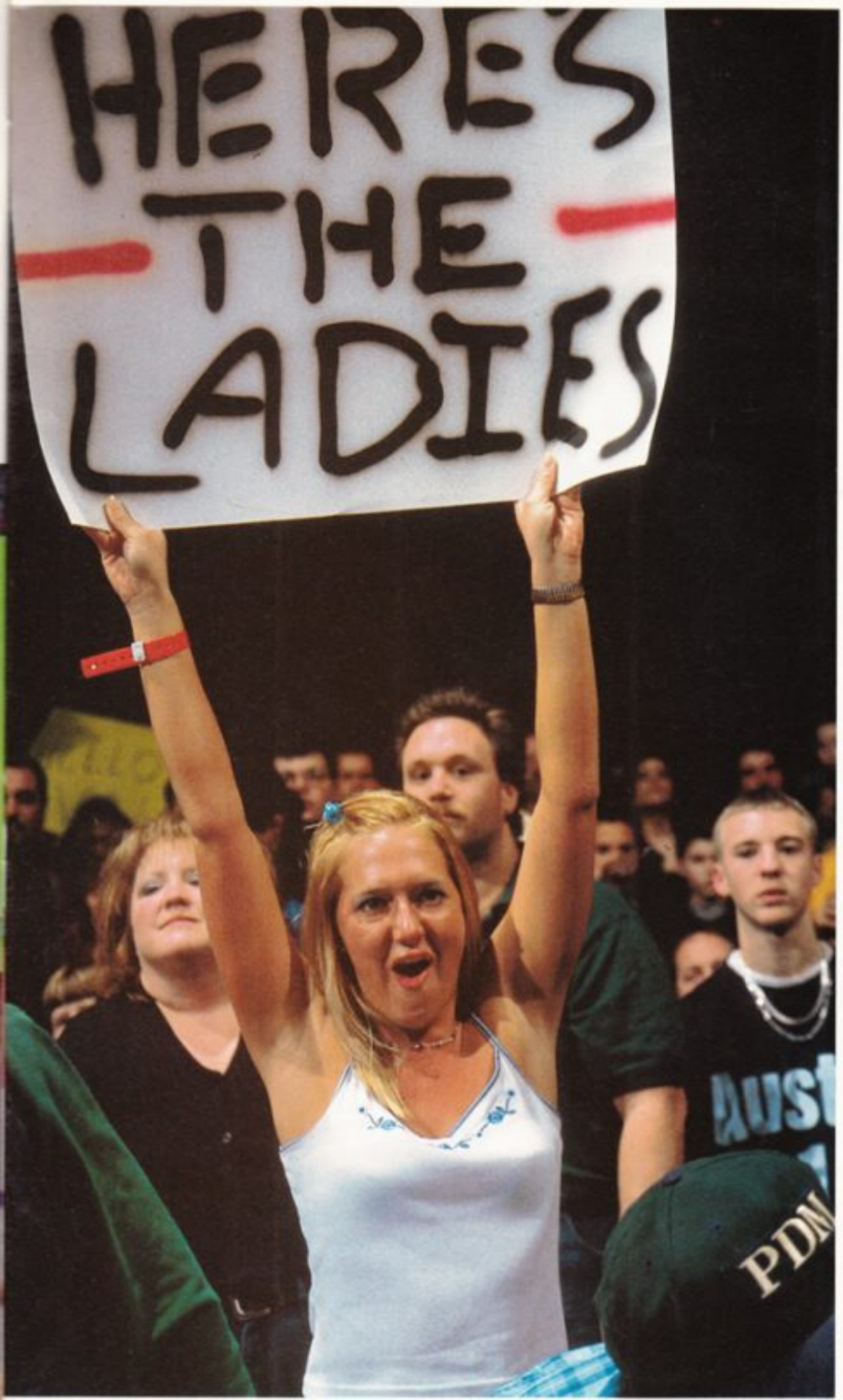
The female fan derives something substantial from watching wrestling—it is a form of entertainment that provides a release from the tensions of day-to-day life.

"I describe the World Wrestling Federation as a full-contact, half-naked soap opera—it combines the melodrama of a serial with the risk of a sport and the physical appeal of very attractive men and women," the L.A. native continued.

"It provides both the comedy and the action that I enjoy in any television show, and no one involved is afraid to push their character or their actions over the top. When I watch wrestling I laugh, I wince, I cheer—it's a terrific release and escape from my normal life... Watching other people act out in the extreme gives me perspective on the stupid anger and anxiety in every day. I may not be able to punch the guy who yells lewd comments on the street or tell off my unreasonable boss, but I can watch someone else do it on wrestling and that's almost as satisfying!"

There is no denying that professional wrestling is a very aggressive form of sports-entertainment. And again, aggressive and assertive behaviors are all too often associated with testosterone. As women are increasingly entering domains dominated by men—in the work force, in athletics, in academia—many find themselves under a great deal of pressure to compete aggressively while simultaneously maintaining their





"femininity." It can be frustrating as hell. Wrestling can serve as a release from the tensions in everyday life—it provides a forum for its fans to escape, to envision... to be entertained! And, believe it or not, some women enjoy wrestling for its aggressive character.

As a woman from Texas stated: "As far as my opinion on the aggressive nature of wrestling, I think that in today's world everything has become more aggressive, more fast-paced, and it's just a reflection of what we, as society, are wanting. By watching wrestling, I get to take out my frustrations by yelling at the TV rather than at someone else."

A student from Seattle, Washington, summed it up beautifully: "About the aggressive nature of wrestling... I have no problem with it whatsoever. It feels good to know the World Wrestling Federation trusts that people... well, some people... can handle some extreme situations and, hell, it is definitely much more entertaining. If people can't handle what the World Wrestling Federation is doing and they don't 'Get It,' then they can change the channel. Nobody ever held a gun to their heads telling them to watch."

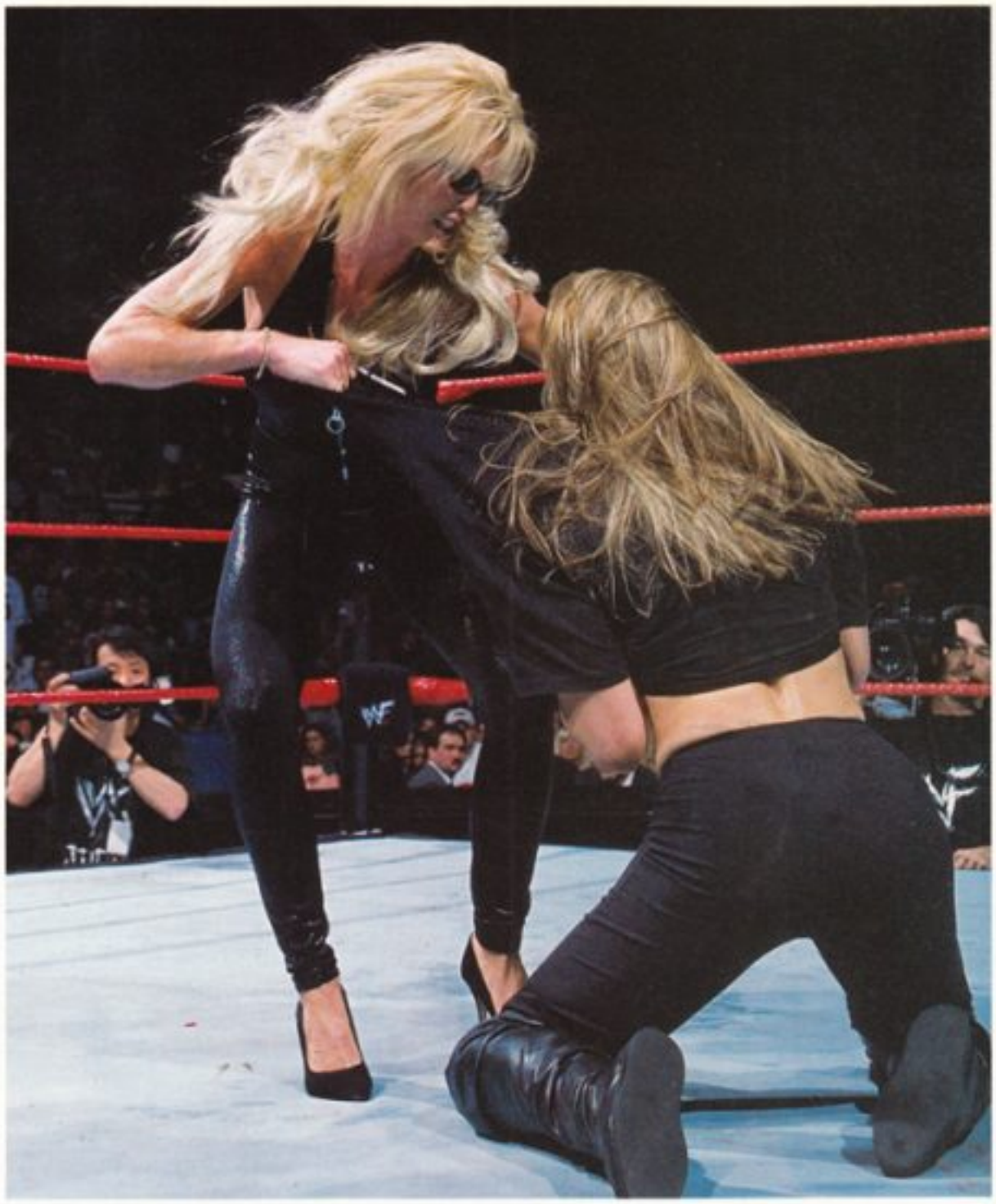
Many of the women interviewed were parents, and there was some discussion concerning the combative nature of professional wrestling and its impact on children.

"My biggest concern has always been my kids," one mother explained. "I feel that even though I let them watch *Heat* and *Raw*, I am still a responsible parent because I am right there with them to teach them about fiction and reality. I stress to my older boy that it's just like *Star Trek*—people put on costumes and act, but in real life they are nice to each other and don't beat each other up. I had to punish him a few times for using some of the World Wrestling Federation's more colorful language [S*ck it!] in front of his grandma, but on the whole he understands that the wrestling superstars are not to be emulated."

Another mother commented: "I believe the 'aggressive' nature of wrestling may be getting a bum rap in the media. Now that the World Wrestling Federation and its rival have become popular again in mainstream America, it has also become the new scapegoat for parents and the media to explain aggressive children... I believe viewers should use good judgment when letting their children watch the World Wrestling Federation. In other words, 'USE YOUR BRAIN!'"

The content of the World Wrestling Federation television programming has undergone incredible changes these past few years. One area concerns the female superstars. No longer merely silent valets whose only role is to flash some skin at ringside, these women have become more and more physical as well as much more involved in story lines, adding depth and a woman's perspective to the squared circle.

"I enjoy watching the female superstars become involved in story lines, whether they are villains or heroines," one female fan explained. "I like the strength and bravado that they display when they challenge the male superstars or each other, in and out of the squared circle. Often the female superstars seem to use their physical attributes to gain whatever advantage they can over men, which is only appropriate considering the physical advantage that the male superstars have (size, experience, etc.). It's gratifying to see that most of the time they back up their beautiful bodies with quick-thinking and creative solutions. They represent smart, ambitious women who will use a situation and their talents to get ahead, often without being unethical unless it's in retribution."



Most of the women interviewed reported distaste for characters and roles such as Terri and Jacqueline, as well as an aversion to the plastic surgery that is so commonplace among the women of the squared circle.

"The girls in PMS I do not care for," a 24-year-old paralegal declared. "I find some of their clothing and story lines offensive. Jacqueline is a good wrestler and I can't help but think that she should wrestle more often instead of trying to be more like Debra or Terri."

When the female Federation Superstars use their sexuality in combination with superior athleticism and wit, then many of the women interviewed did not find it offensive. For instance, superstars such as Chyna have the undying loyalty of today's female fans.

"Chyna, I feel, is one of the strongest female leads I have seen anywhere in a long time," one woman asserted. "She has brawn and beauty and I respect her for that. She is not out flashing her chest or being femininely manipulative when she steps into the ring."

A 32-year-old grad student stated: "First and foremost, I watch [wrestling] to see Chyna. Her build is fantastic, her personality is great and she represents all my pent-up female warrior aggression—I grew up with two brothers who were always tormenting me!"

So, what do the female fans of professional wrestling want to see more of in the squared circle? Their answers were as varied as their profiles: Less talk from Mr. McMahon, more women in the ring, fewer women in the ring, more DX, more Shane McMahon... the list goes on. However, the majority of female wrestling fans want more action.

"Let the women do a little more. I mean, I know compared to the 80s they are, but let's see Chyna kick some ass; or Sable—one of my favorite moments over the last year was when Sable powerbombed Marc Mero. Get PMS out of the way... and let's get a little hardcore with these women."

As is evident, the female wrestling fan does exist, and her appreciation of and approach to sports-entertainment are not based on watching a bunch of sexy athletic men parading around in next to nothing. Rather, the female fan is one whose enthusiasm for professional wrestling is based on her desire to be entertained. The female wrestling fan certainly does "get it."

If Vince McMahon is wise, he will listen to his female audience—and give them what they want. Hell, how do you think President Clinton got elected? ■

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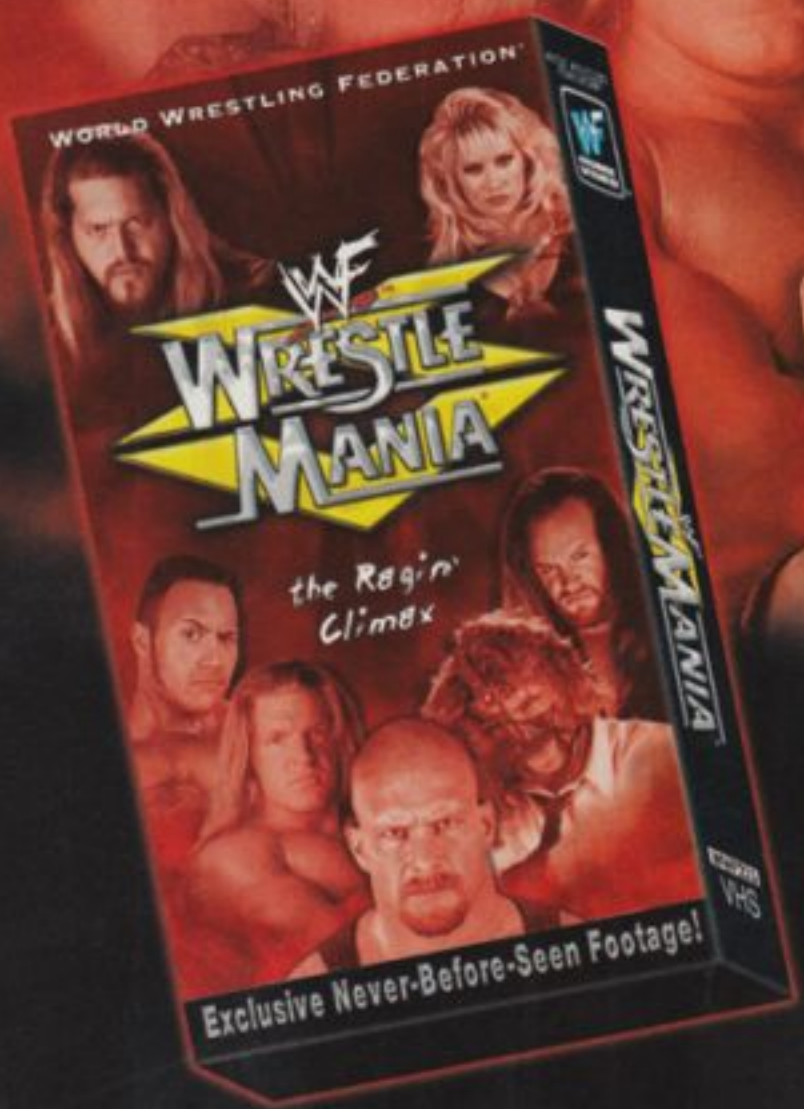

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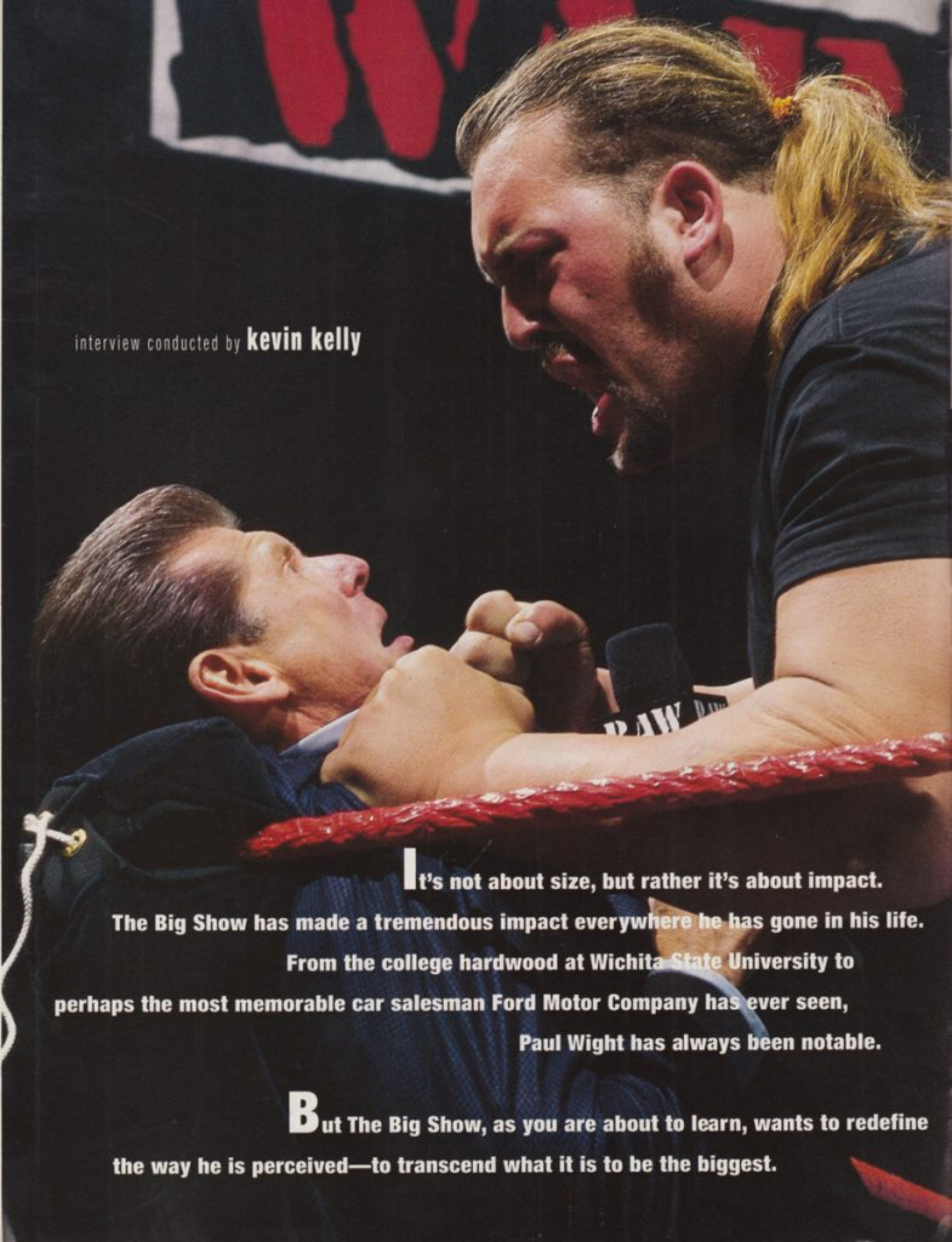
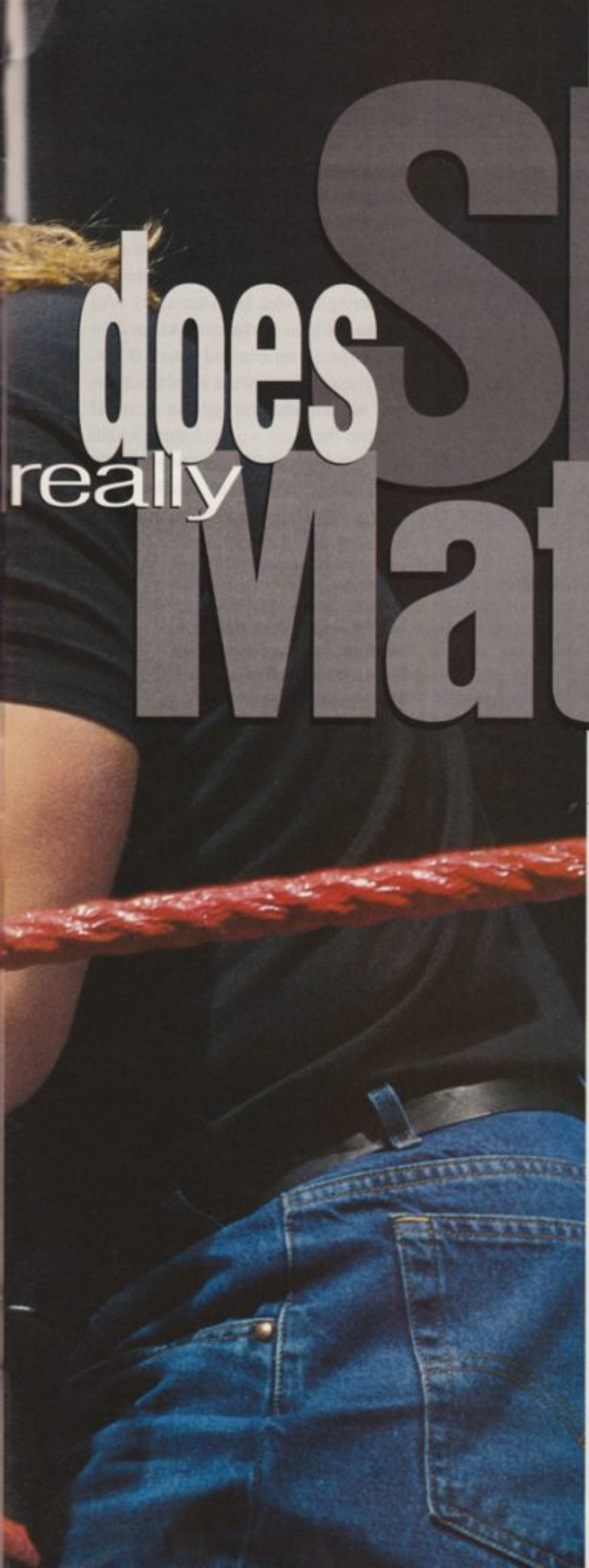


interview conducted by **kevin kelly**

It's not about size, but rather it's about impact. The Big Show has made a tremendous impact everywhere he has gone in his life. From the college hardwood at Wichita State University to perhaps the most memorable car salesman Ford Motor Company has ever seen, Paul Wight has always been notable.

But The Big Show, as you are about to learn, wants to redefine the way he is perceived—to transcend what it is to be the biggest.



does SIZE really Matter?

KK: What were you like as a child?

Wight: As a kid, I always entertained my family. I was the type of kid who told a lot of jokes and tried to make everybody laugh. I tried to make everybody laugh in school and consequently I got into a lot of trouble. I was one of those kind of kids that annoyed the hell out of everybody, but you still loved me.

KK: What was your home life like? What did your parents do? Did you have a lot of friends? What sports did you play?

Wight: I played a lot of sports in school. It was a way for me to interact with a lot of kids. I grew up pretty far out in the country.

KK: In what state?

Wight: South Carolina—so there weren't a lot of neighbors around. I had a few friends growing up. My mom worked for the local county sheriff's office… she was a deputy. My dad was a mill right/superintendent at the Savannah River Plant.

KK: So, as you got older and Mom was working at the sheriff's department, did you ever get in trouble?

Wight: There's a funny story about the first girl I ever kissed—I got arrested.

KK: You got arrested?

Wight: I was 12, she was 11. It was at a roller skating rink and the only problem was that at age 12, I was six feet two inches and 220 pounds with a chocolate milk moustache.

Even though I probably looked like I was 18 or 19, I was still a 12-year-old kid. I will never forget the security guards at the rink arrested me. It terrified me. Here I am in tears at 12 years old. I had never been in trouble in my life! This guy wanted to see identification and I didn't even have a library card. I'm 12 years old! My mom—being the angel she was—came to my rescue and cut a huge promo on this guy and tried to spare me whatever mental damage I might have suffered.

KK: Were you always comfortable with your size, being the biggest kid in the class?

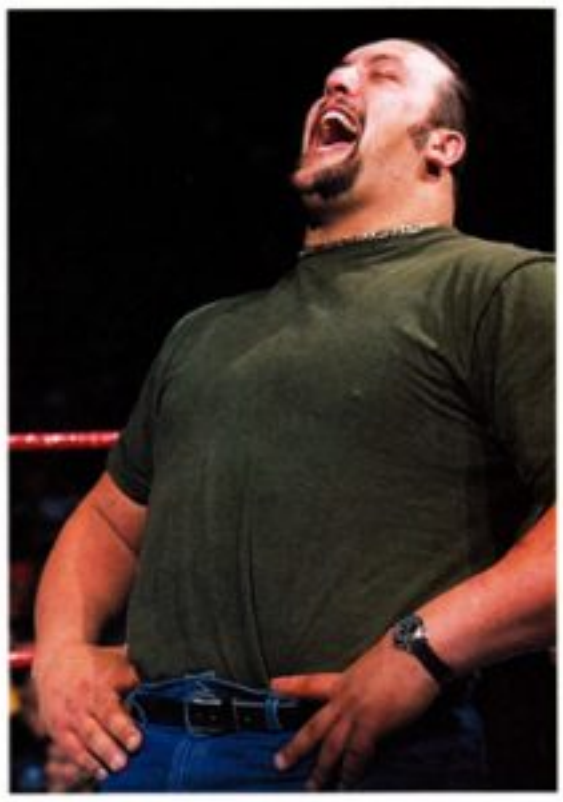
Wight: Yeah, I never took advantage of it. I was never a bully. I was the guy in seventh or eighth grade that, when the high school kids were beating up on my friends, used to beat up the high school kids. It was one of those things where I would always be the type to look out for the underdog. Sometimes it doesn't work out in my job because I'm the guy I hate. In real life, I would root for the underdog. I've always been comfortable with my size. I've never used it to bully people around. If anything I've never made light of my size. I've always made people comfortable being around me by being personable, being funny and making people relax. Most of the time the first thing people do when they see me is that they suck their underwear up into the unknown and they can't talk. So, I have to try and loosen them up.

KK: Ralph Sampson was a center in basketball at seven feet four inches and he always had dreams of playing point guard. When he played for the Houston Rockets he would bring the ball up the court and things like that just because he wanted to be something different and something that he wasn't. Can you relate to that?

Wight: Totally. I played basketball in high school and my big thing was that I always wanted to be a shooting guard. I always wanted to be the guy who came down and pulled the three pointers—even though I was the guy who came down and slam-dunked all the time, when all the guys who shot three-pointers wanted to dunk. You always want to be something different. I don't think anybody is really totally satisfied. You just learn to adjust and learn to accept what you have and to use it to the best of your ability.

You know, I always wanted to be a Marine Biologist when I was a kid and do work with sharks and things like that. That was my big interest when I was a kid. But there's something about a seven-foot, 500-pound guy in scuba gear that just doesn't work. I am shark meat! I look like a big seal in the water—it doesn't work!

KK: Being one of the biggest men in professional wrestling, you're always



going to have that label, you're always going to be the "big guy." Do you want to try to recreate yourself? Do you want to change people's perception of you and your ability in the ring?

Wight: Without a doubt. That's always been my goal, even growing up. The first thing people do when they see someone of my immense size is they automatically assume you've got a lesser intellect or that you're not very coordinated. For me, I've always been the type that's always worked hard at being, for my size, extremely quick and coordinated because just flat-out I hated getting laughed at as a kid. So, I did the extra things. I did the jumping rope and the extra drills to be faster and to be quicker. In this sport, I'm somewhat of a freak for my size to be able to do the things I do. I mean, I can do kip-ups and things like that, which doesn't really fit my character, so to speak, that the sports-entertainment world is used to. They're used to a guy like me being a lumbering brawler, let alone a guy who can be the total package, so to speak—who's quick, athletic and smart. If that was the case, everyone would put the belt on me and change the channel because the game's over. I work within my boundaries and I try to slowly bring along new things so that people tuning in will hopefully see something new that they didn't expect from me. I just try to keep everybody happy and also protect my career, because I want to be around for a long time. If I do everything in the first six months it doesn't leave a whole hell of a lot to show.

KK: Where did you play college ball?

Wight: When I played sports in college I transferred around a lot. I went through junior college first because I had gone to a small high school and thoroughly dominated my school in South Carolina. I averaged triple doubles. I went to junior college and got into a really tough league in Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas. I was All-Conference there. Then I went to Wichita State and went Division One. You know, we had a real tough schedule. We played Kansas, Oklahoma State, Alabama, Utah, Florida, Notre Dame and a lot of the teams that were in the big leagues. So, for me it was good exposure, but it was kind of a rude awakening. No matter how good an athlete I am, I was 320 pounds and to be quite honest, some of the athletes in the other colleges were unbelievable. Fifteen years ago I think I would have been a phenom. Right now, I'm just another big slow guy.

KK: Did you get offers to play pro ball?

Wight: I think if I had stuck with it I would have done better, but it's just one of those things for me—I had to face reality. I really didn't have my heart in

the game anymore. My father passed away when I was in college and it really took the wind out of my sails. I was really close to him. And the coach I was really close to, they fired him midway through the season and replaced him with a coach who wanted a different kind of ball club. So, he got rid of all the guys I played with and was recruited with. And it was just one of those things where it put a real foul taste in my mouth, so I just kind of gave it up.

KK: After college, how did you get into this profession?

Wight: I was basically working different kinds of jobs. I sold cars in Wichita, Kansas. I was known as "Tall Paul"—you couldn't forget me! I'd pick up the car so you could walk underneath it and check out what was underneath. Believe me, it was hard because people would absolutely die when I walked up to them…

[At this point, Stone Cold Steve Austin has a comment.]

Austin: Oh, bullshit!

Wight: Oh, f@#$ off, Austin! [Laughing] So, I tried that and did very well over the summer. You know I had a gift for gab. Then Christmas comes around, and that was my first time making a lot of money quick. I made three or four grand the first month! It was like... Oh, my God! I had a nice apartment, nice furniture, a nice car, I was making money pretty steady… I was on top of the world. December rolls around, and nobody buys cars for Christmas. And they don't buy cars in January because they're getting Christmas bills. When I made 50 bucks for December and January I figured I needed to find a new damn job because I'm getting pretty hungry and tired of Spam and baloney.

I did some bail bondsman work for a friend of mine—following guys and picking them up. There was a friend of mine in Wichita, Kansas, who owned an electronics business, and he had a friend in Chicago who promoted bands and athletes and what-not and he told me that I had to meet this guy, Jimmy. He

said that Jimmy and me were cut from the same mold. I had never met this guy before and he had never met me, but his friend, John, was a mutual friend and he said we were just alike—personality and everything. He said we were like brothers.

So, I met Jimmy and he had bought out a whole bunch of electronics equipment and gave me a job loading equipment. And I told him I was so broke at the time I was eating toothpaste sandwiches… that's how broke I was. But I was too damn proud to ask anyone for money. I told Jimmy, "You can pay me by buying me dinner."

So, when he paid me I bought him dinner, because I was really thankful for the work. We hit it off. The one thing I was always impressed with was that Jimmy was always very honest with me. He told me, "I don't know what I can do for you. I'll try to maybe get you to play football with the [Chicago] Bears or something like that, but if everything else fails I'll give you a job with my company and at least you'll eat every day."

To me, it sounded damn good. On the plane ride out I was talking to Jim and I said, "Maybe I should give this professional wrestling thing a try." I had always been a fan and watched it and, you know, I knew the ins and outs of it a little bit. Like any fan on the outside, unless you've laced up a pair of the boots you have no idea what this sport is like.

So, I told him, "I don't know if I'd be any good, but I might be one of those guys who gets beat up… they gotta make something."

[At this point, D'Lo Brown interrupts and gives his current 1-800-COLLECT commercial a plug.]

Brown: Hey, you can save a bundle by using 1-800-COLLECT!

Wight: Thanks, D'Lo… [laughing] That's one problem with doing an interview in the hall—everybody gets in the damn way.

Anyway, Jim and I talked about it, and he asked if someone could make any money with it. I said, "I have no idea, but let's just give it a shot."

The first gimmick I did, I was going to call myself Paul Bunyan. I was going to get this really hot chick in a blue dress and call her Babe. Needless to say, it worked for a while. And it got me a lot of dates because I met a lot of cute girls and promised them the Babe spot, but it never turned out.

Of all things, Jimmy was doing a live karaoke show on the "Morning Drive" with Danny Bonaducci from *The Partridge Family*. So, Jimmy had a spot where Danny was going to play Jimmy Hart and Hulk Hogan in a charity basketball tournament and he needed a secret partner. Well, I played college ball, so Danny brought me in as his secret partner.

The whole angle behind it was for me to meet Hulk and see about maybe getting a job. He met me... and Hulk's a very good friend of mine and he's been a big influence on me. Television is one thing, but in real life he's probably one of the greatest people I know. He's been like a big brother to me. Hulk said I had a big dollar sign written on my forehead, only I didn't know it. He said I could make a lot of money doing this. They got me a tryout with WCW and that's how it all started.

I trained for six months and my first match was against Hulk Hogan and they put the belt on me. There was no BSing. I'm in the mix and I'm in the middle of it and here I am. It was good… I was very green and didn't understand how a lot of the politics worked and how a lot of the things worked with the other guys. I had a lot of learning to do. A lot of people helped me along the way. Diamond Dallas Page was one of the guys who helped train me. Sting helped teach me a lot in the ring, because I spent a lot of my program time when I first started with Sting. He was one of the best at working with bigger guys and helping them along and it turned out.

I started out as the "Son of Andre"—which to me at the time, in all sincerity, I wasn't very comfortable with. You know, I always admired Andre. I always loved to watch him and everyone had so much respect for him in the business that for me—being the snot-nosed damn rookie coming in as the "Son of Andre"—not only was it hard boots to fill, it was very uncomfortable boots to fill. I never liked the perception of lying to people—and I'm sure in every job you probably have to do a little bit of lying—but that was really hard for me to swallow and run with. I never met the man. I didn't know him and believe me, deep in my heart, I wish I would have met him. Hulk loved him so much and said I could have learned so much from him. For me, it was a very hard thing to deal with. But you like the paycheck, so you make the very best you can with it.

The thing was... when I started out down there, a lot of people who were trying to help me knew about this business and a lot of people in charge didn't have a damn clue what to do with me. I mean, when I first started I choke-slammed everybody, A to Z. Well, that lasted for a few months, and then we would run out of talent. Then we had to start doing other things and it left me in

a very compromising position. There wasn't anything done for marketing; there wasn't anything done to identify me as a character. I basically became—because the role was easy to mold into—kind of the thug for hire. Consequently, I became the type of person that I don't think wrestling fans could ever trust. Just when I'd get that momentum behind them I'd run out of opponents and then... Oh God, there I go, I've got to be a bad guy again. And I stayed a bad guy because it was comfortable. It's a lot easier to get people to hate you than get them to love you, unless they get to know you.

It was hard for me because my real personality is that I'm a very funny guy—very straightforward. I'm not a prick. I guess I can be—I'm sure I haven't made everybody happy all the time. But to get personality and charm over on camera is hard, especially now that I am *in* the Big Show and I *am* "the Big Show."

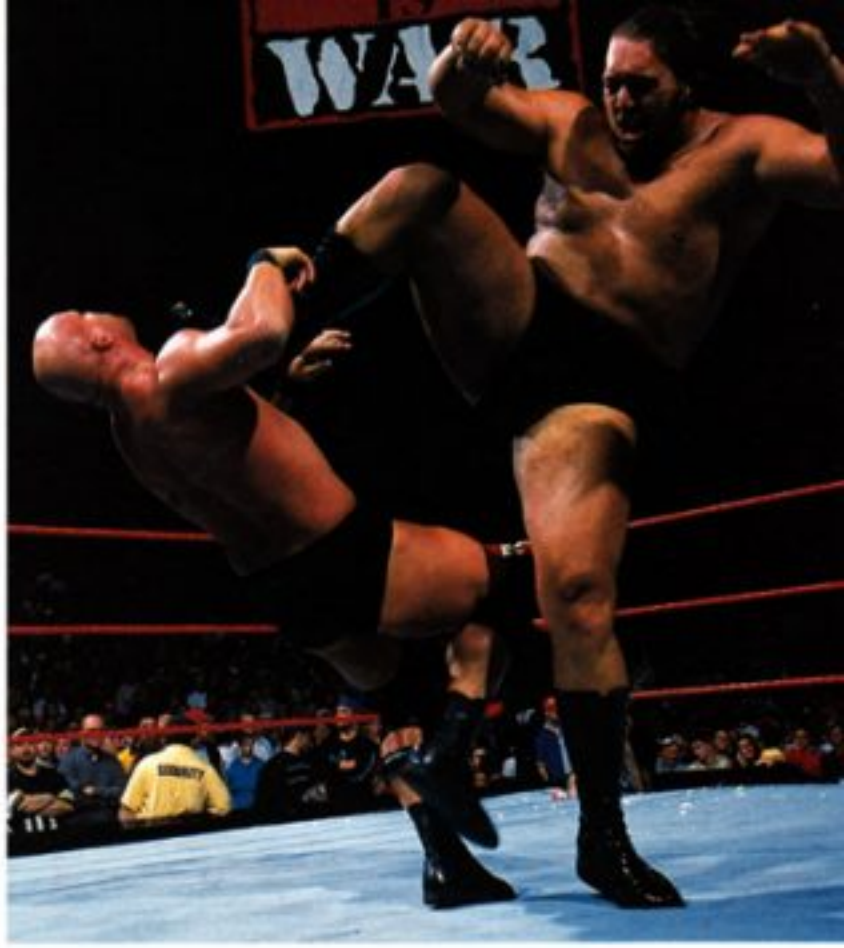
Hogan told me a long time ago... when I was frustrated about a lot of things, he said, "The only way you're really going to make any money and make yourself what you really need to be is you've got to go to New York."

KK: Now, the story is that he was helpful, instrumental in some respects, in getting you up here.

Wight: Well, instrumental in the fact that I was asking him, "What should I do?" Because it was a situation where a lot of guys down there are established... they have their characters, they have their positioning in the networks. And a lot of the people that have control didn't see me as a viable talent. They basically saw me as a "flash in the pan" and I was done. It was very frustrating for me.

I was 26 years old at the time, and I was trying to figure out, Jesus, this can't be it. I can do so much more, just give me a chance. But the thing was, they were pretty much burned out on ideas. They've never made a giant. They never made an Andre the Giant. They never made a Hulk Hogan or a Macho Man Randy Savage. They never made talent. They made Sting, they made me and they made Goldberg. That's it! Every big star in wrestling has basically come from [the World Wrestling Federation] with the exception of a few, such as Ric Flair, Arn Anderson and those guys. I think a lot of them boosted their careers when they did come here.

The Federation is synonymous with wrestling superstars. When I met with these people and talked to them, it was a situation where they saw a lot of talent in me and saw a lot of potential. And for once in a long time I felt needed and felt I had a chance to grow.



KK: Were the last few days at WCW pretty tough?

Wight: They were very tough. Of course, there was a lot of pressure on me from my boss—and we all know who he is—because all of a sudden he realized that perhaps I wasn't the "lump of shit" that he thought I was. And he was getting some pressure from upper-level executives above him who wondered, "We found this guy, we trained him, we developed him—why are we losing him? Why doesn't he want to sign with us?"

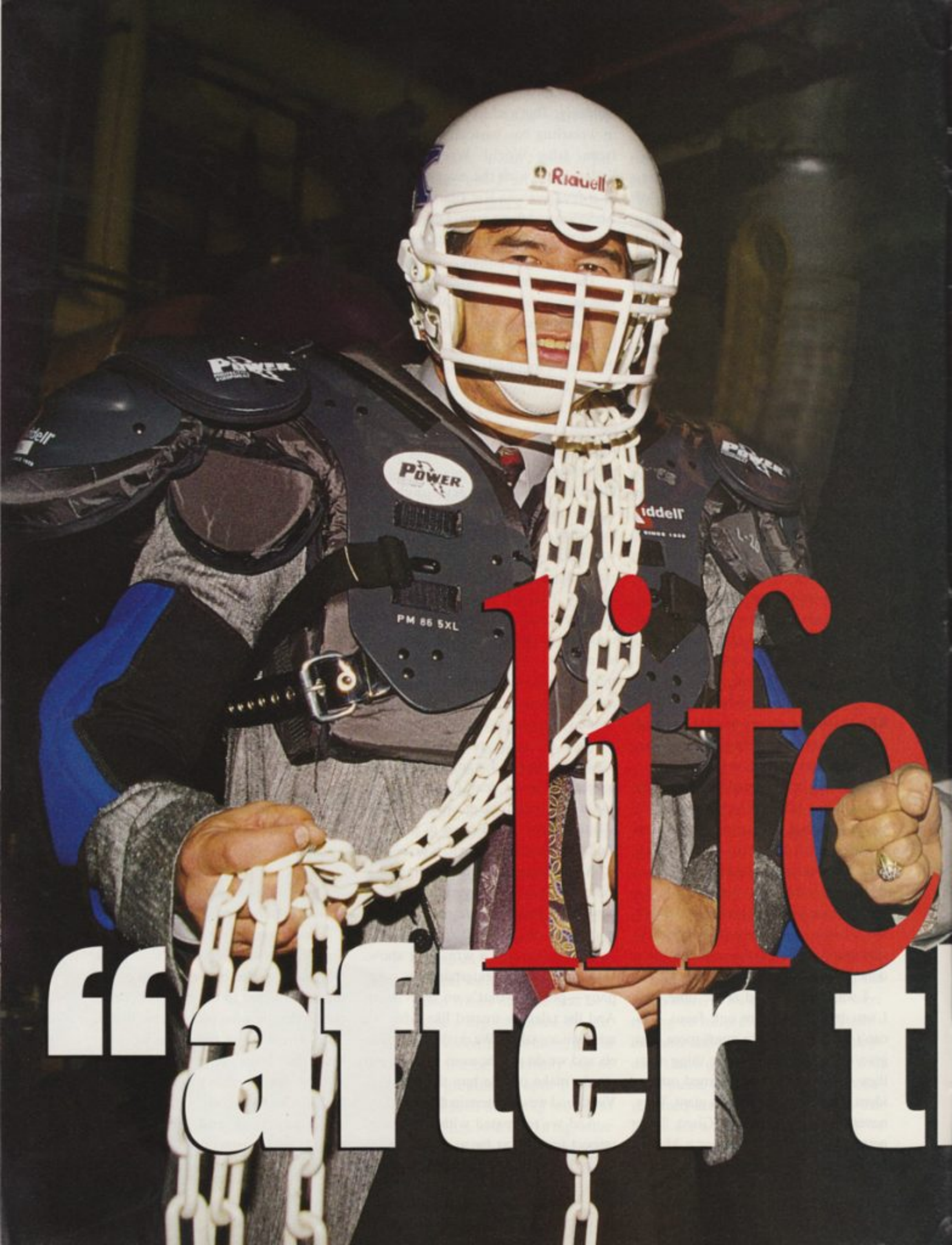
Well, it's not a question of anger; it's a question of I want to go with a bigger and better deal. I've got a wife and a little girl to take care of. There's a future there and I have to plan for them. My future, as I see it, is here.

After getting here and seeing how incredibly organized everything is and how much the talent is respected here... you know, in WCW it's a television company that has a wrestling show. Here, it's a sports-entertainment company—period—that's on television. And the talent is treated like what we are—we are talent. We do draw the tickets and we do put the asses in seats and we do make people buy the Pay-Per-Views and we do entertain the crowd.

And we're treated with a lot more respect up here as far as pay scale, as far as just in the way of general help. Our travel department, when I was down in WCW, was just a damn nightmare to get anything done. It was a nightmare to get a ticket—you're screwed! They tried to fly me coach or on a charter in like a commuter plane or something. I mean, sorry, my ass doesn't fit but in so many seats. Up here, I don't like to fly through Atlanta. The Federation's travel department goes out of its way to make sure I don't have to fly through Atlanta.

I walk around all the time with my mouth hanging open going, "My God, this is the way people get treated?" I feel like a star now. Before I felt like a piece of meat that was on television and then I went back to my humble little outhouse. Up here, I do feel like a star. And when you're treated like a star, your work ethic improves and your self-esteem improves and your product most definitely improves.

I think you can see a definite correlation because the fans understand that. Obviously, we're blowing them out of the damn water in the ratings because our product is what people want to see. They know we're out there working hard. They know everybody cares about putting out a viable product here. In that place, everybody's damn glad to get a paycheck and go home and nobody *really* cares. And I think that's the biggest difference. ■



life "after th

When athletes reach the end of their active careers and are ready to retire from their chosen sports, what are they to do then? In sports such as football and baseball, oftentimes the athletes invest in various businesses for their retirement from competition. Other athletes may opt to go into broadcasting. Some do quite well for themselves, while the majority disappear into society, working "regular jobs" because they haven't accumulated enough money during their playing days to retire. Although this is less commonplace today, in large part due to the tremendous salaries paid to professional athletes, a significant number still manage to blow their good fortune and have to find "real" jobs, such as selling insurance, working in a warehouse or driving a truck.

BY DENNIS A. BRENT

he ring"

PROFESSIONAL WRESTLERS have numerous career choices as well after their wrestling days are over. Nowadays, sports-entertainers are earning more than ever and investing wisely, opening gyms, investing in mutual funds, etc., for their "lives after the ring." Some of them will have enough for retirement, but many won't. Usually, what a retired wrestler wants the most, though, is to continue to be involved "in the business" somehow. The camaraderie of the locker room, traveling all over the world, performing in front of enthusiastic live audiences—it's like a fraternity and these men are "brothers." It is hard to leave the filled arenas, the bright lights, the crowds, the millions of fans, and become a "regular" person with a "regular" job. Very few are able to walk away voluntarily. And just about all who do want to return in some capacity.

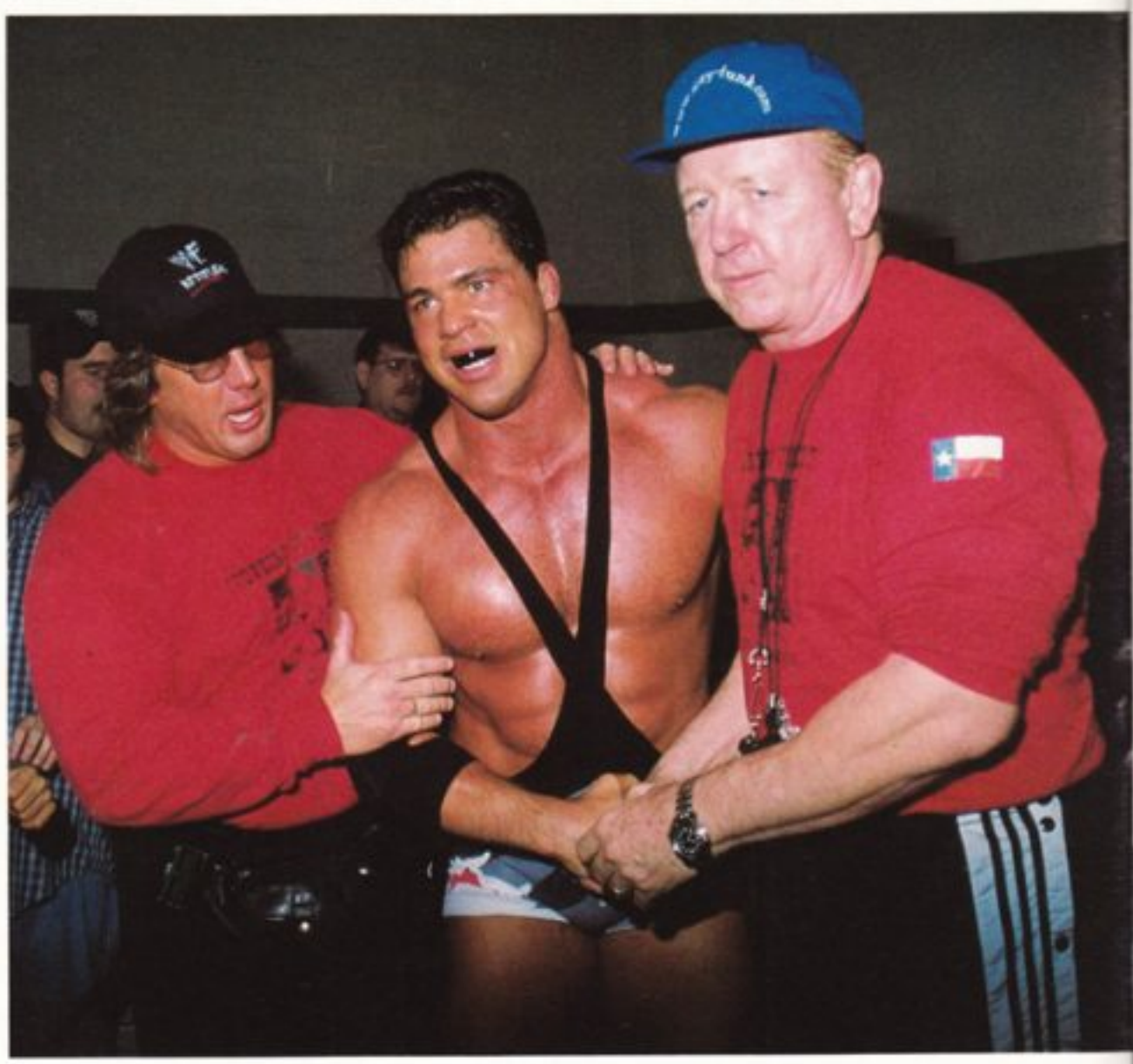
Today, there is definitely a place for retired wrestlers to continue to be involved in many aspects of the business. The World Wrestling Federation employs a host of retired wrestlers who play active roles in the operation. Some of the names that may be familiar who still work behind the scenes for the Federation in a number of ways are Pat Patterson, Gerald Brisco, "Golden Boy" Arnold Skaaland, Tony Garea, Jack Lanza, Jerry "The King" Lawler, Dr. Tom Prichard, Terry Taylor, Gorilla Monsoon, Dory Funk, Jr., Dok Hendrix, Hillbilly Jim and "Classy" Freddy Blassie. Now add Shawn Michaels to this list, as he is the current World Wrestling Federation Commissioner. Ex-managers also perform duties in the Federation.

What do they all do for the World Wrestling Federation? Their duties range from public relations to broadcasting to actual involvement in television programming. They all comprise an important cog in the machinery of the Federation although their wrestling days, or managing careers, for the most part are over. Some work behind the scenes and some are seen on camera, such as Vince's "stooges," Pat Patterson and Gerald Brisco. Even though they appear to be comical lackeys for Mr. McMahon's every whim on television, they perform a valuable function behind the scenes (in addition to getting Mr. McMahon his coffee). During live broadcasts or a taping of a World Wrestling Federation event, they are very busy backstage working with the talent, Vince McMahon and the staff to ensure that the details are attended to properly.

Gerald Brisco told *Raw Magazine*, "We perform many important duties for Mr. McMahon. Whatever he needs done, we're here to do it. I love my job and I love this business. Every week is a new challenge and it's really fun to be with as great a company as this one. I love the wrestling business and I'm thrilled to still be a part of it."

During his wrestling career, Brisco was a regional main eventer, but he never performed in front of the millions (and millions) of fans that he does today as one of Vince's "stooges." And Gerald loves every minute of it.

Pat Patterson agrees. "I'd do anything for this company and I love this business. I still get a kick out of going into the ring, even if the people are booing me."



Dory Funk, Jr.—with Tom Prichard and prized pupil Kurt Angle (above)—passes on his knowledge of the sport at the Federation's Funkin' Dojo training camp. Despite being well into his eighties, "Classy" Freddy Blassie (right) can still educate future "pencil-necked geeks" about the business.

Some retired wrestlers prefer to stay behind the scenes and not go in front of the television camera, even refusing to be interviewed. They are road agents, meaning that they are required to travel to every town the World Wrestling Federation visits, acting as "team leaders" to the wrestlers—giving them the lineup for the night and other details

they might need. The agents are also responsible for the superstars' appearing on time and for keeping track of what "gets over" with the crowd and what doesn't go well. They write reports of what happened, what the weather conditions were, the attendance, what the matches were and who won and any and all details the office needs. The road agents also make sure the talent gets to their destinations, whether to the arenas or for personal appearances.

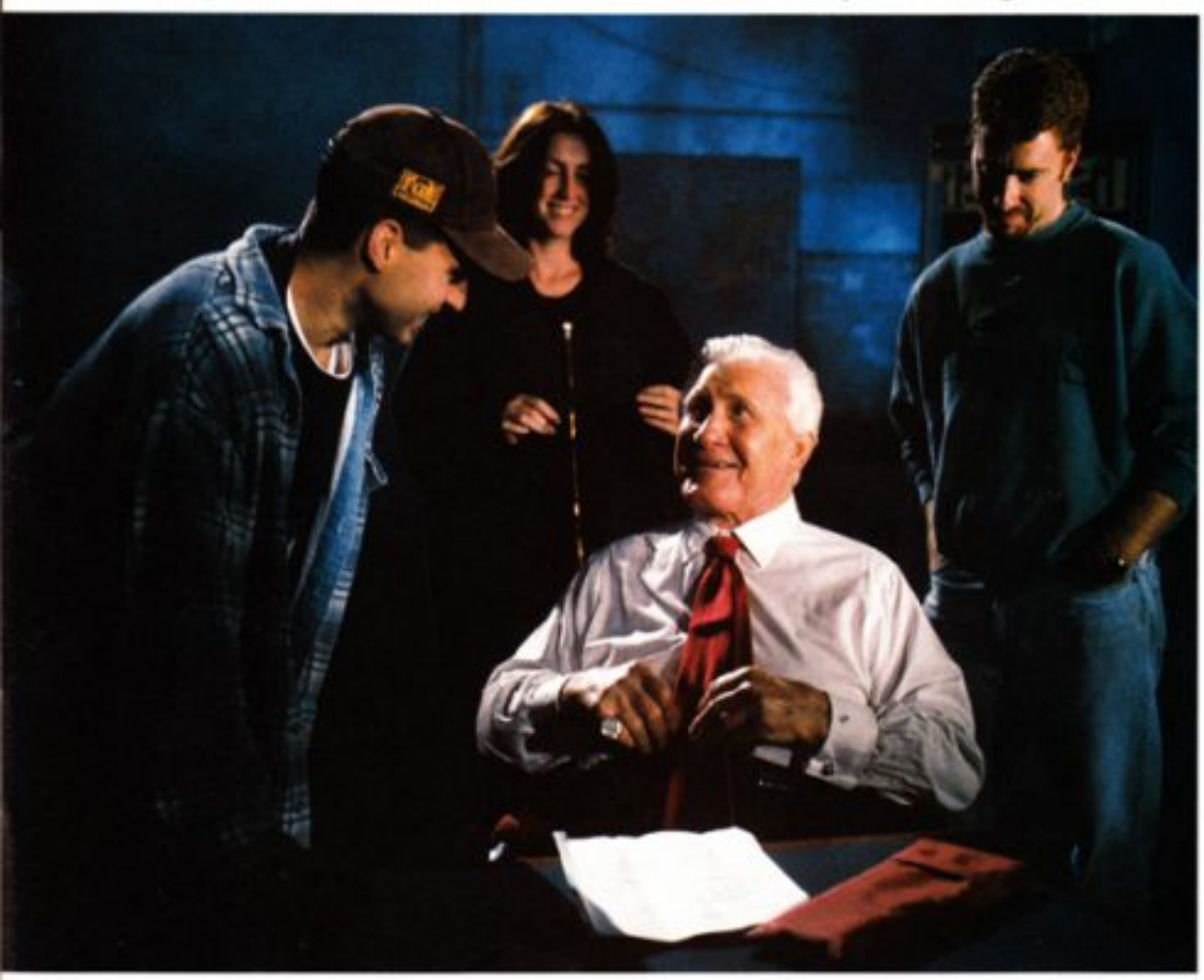
Jim Cornette works behind the scenes with the young talent in the Funkin' Dojo as well as booking them on independent cards so they build experience. Bruno Lauer, known as Harvey Whippleman and "Downtown Bruno" in the Memphis, Tennessee area, works at TV events backstage as well. Former manager Teddy Long has become a successful Federation referee. Dory Funk, Jr. and Tom Prichard work with new talent, training them to be better athletes and performers.

On the announcing side, Dok Hendrix (a/k/a Michael P.S. Hayes) has made a successful transition from being one of wrestling's top "bad boys" to being a terrific voice for the World Wrestling Federation's Slam Jam commercials. He describes area shows and other news that is injected into the television shows in all parts of the country, keeping fans informed about what is happening in their area.

The former Freebird told *Raw Magazine*, "I love being in front of the camera and I love still being part of the business. Except for maybe being a singer in a rock-and-roll band, I don't see myself doing anything else."

Jerry "The King" Lawler is another top regional wrestling champion who is now probably seen by more people on a weekly basis as an announcer on *RAW* than in all his wrestling matches as the U.S.W.A. Champion in Tennessee and Texas combined. When asked if "the King" liked what he was doing, he replied, "I wouldn't be doing anything else. I love it!"

As for getting back in the ring, most of them want to, but a few don't. Pat Patterson and Gerald Brisco DO get in the ring occasionally and look forward to the opportunity to wrestle, even if they get their butts kicked by Stone Cold Steve Austin or the Legion of Doom. Jerry "The King" Lawler still wrestles on occasion and is still active in the Memphis wrestling promotion, as is Michael P.S. Hayes. Terry Taylor was recently added to the creative team and although he hasn't wrestled very much in the last few years, he says he is ready if the opportunity comes along. Jim Cornette still loves to manage young talent at independent shows and lives and breathes the business.

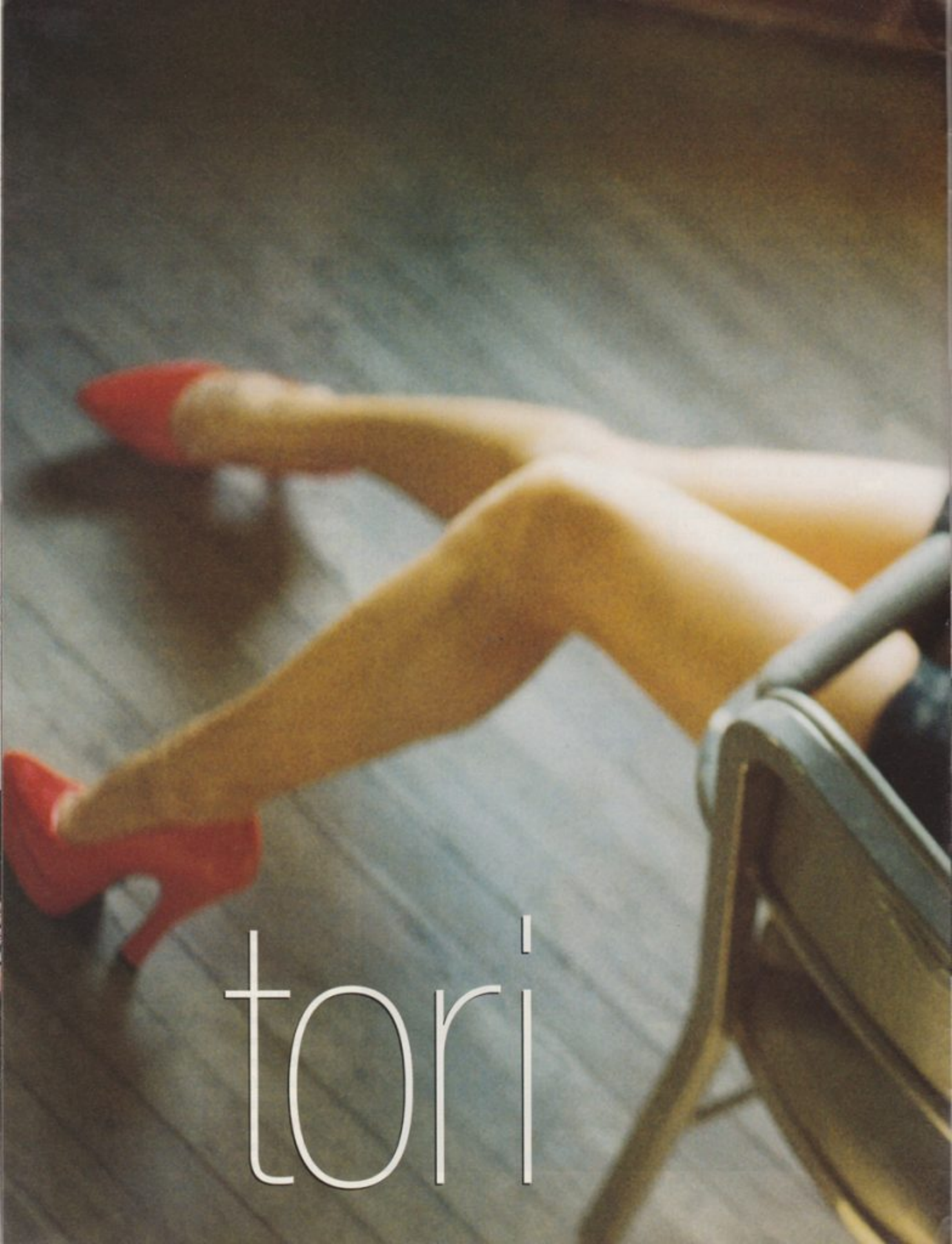


Freddy Blassie performs a number of functions for the Federation, such as public appearances, appearing in occasional commercials, at trade shows, etc. He claims that he could "kick the tail of any of these young 'pencil-necked geeks'" if the Federation would let him wrestle, but he says, "[T]hey're too afraid to let me in the ring. Actually, I'm very happy doing what I do for the company and am thrilled to still be a part of everything. I love the excitement. You asked me earlier if today's wrestling is too wild or over the top? F@#$ no! Today's World Wrestling Federation shows are the best television shows I've ever seen. I can't wait to see what those crazy guys are going to do next. I love this business!"

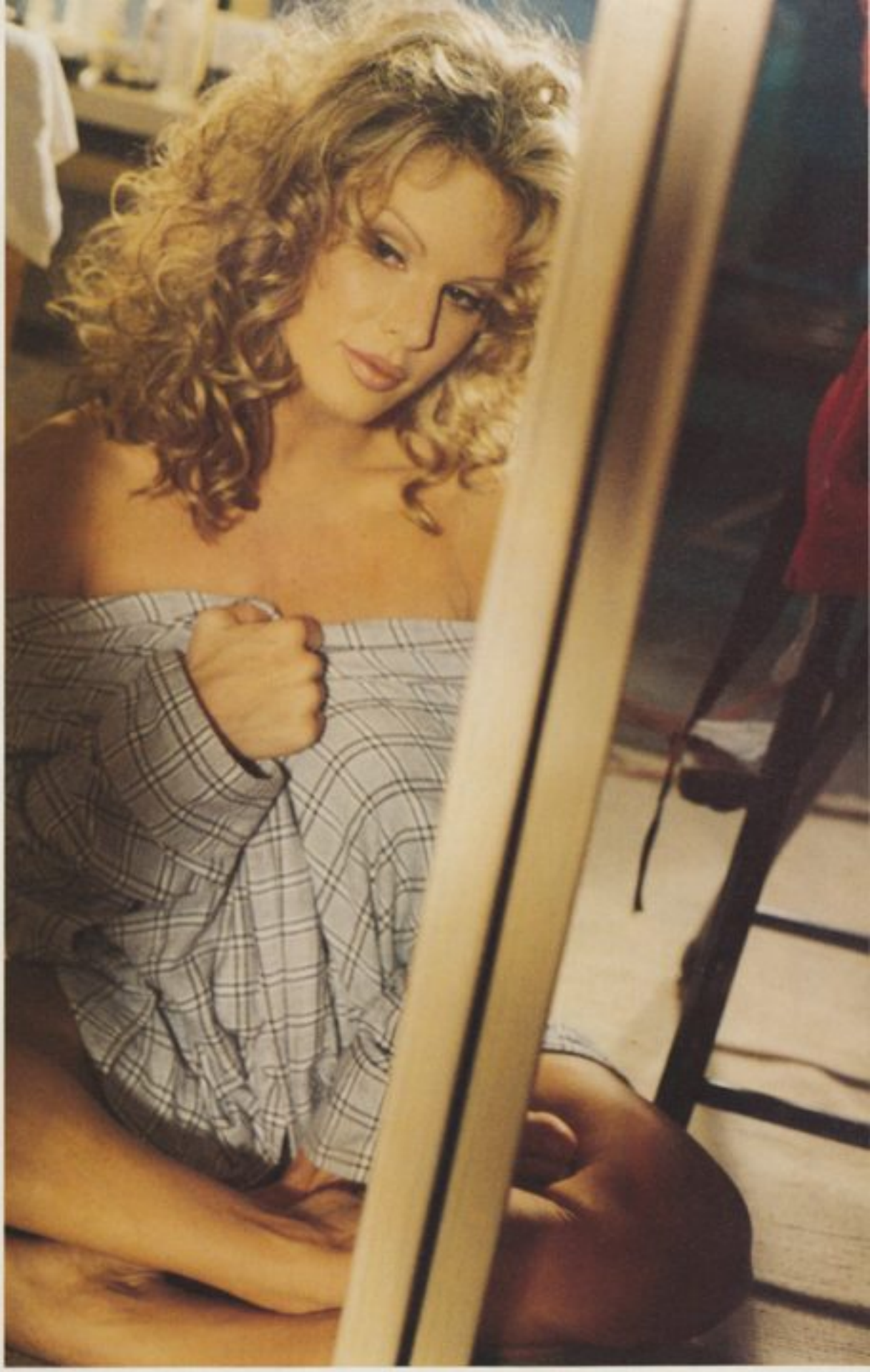
The bottom line here is: These guys "get it." There's that phrase again. In this case, "getting it" means that they can go with the new direction of the business and still fit in. I know of retired wrestlers who knock today's product because it's not the way "they did it" back then. Well, this is 1999 and as the saying goes, things have to be "kicked up a notch" for the times. Maybe the Federation has kicked it up quite a few notches, but these guys definitely fit in. Look at Patterson and Brisco! Those guys deserve their own primetime show!

The retired wrestlers working here enjoy still contributing to the product, each in his own way. They are happy to be here and we are just as happy that they ARE here!

Is there life after the ring? For the retired wrestlers who work for the World Wrestling Federation, there is a LOT of life after the ring and it just gets better and better all the time. ■


tori

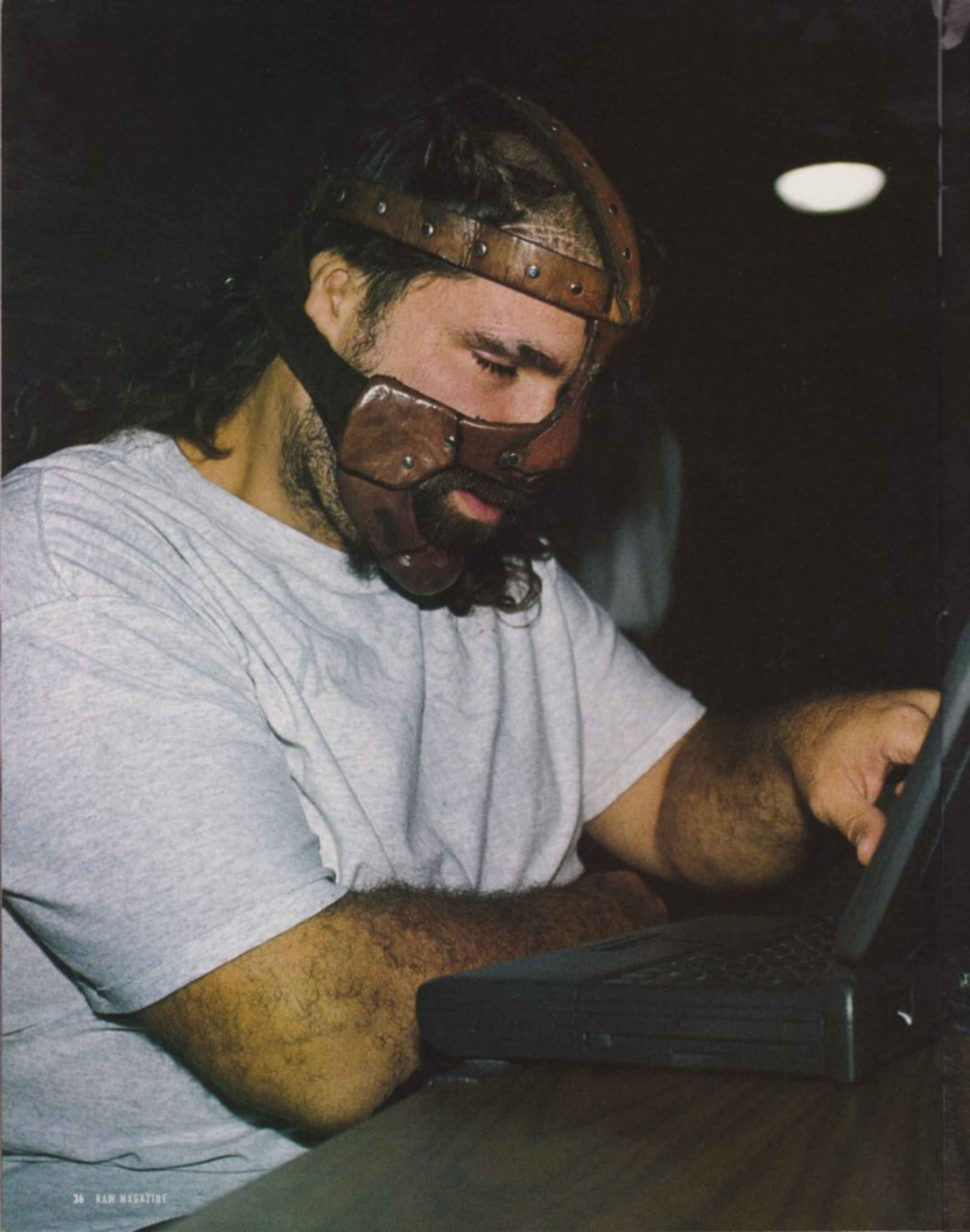
Unlocking the **mystery** of **Tori has been an ongoing process. Like the puzzle that never ends, her** diversity **of look and emotion keeps us** guessing and waiting for what's next. **A window, however, has now been opened through the artistic photography of** Leroy Roper.



The Dallas, Texas–based Roper combines painting, backdrops and live models to take viewers of his photography into another world… a fantasy world. Roper's art blended with Tori's sensuality allows us to go where no *Raw Magazine* has ever gone before.

Is Tori vulnerable? **Submissive?** Playful? **Roper's minimalist approach to photography combined with an indescribable atmosphere in his studio brings out Tori more than we have ever seen.** Leroy allows his subjects to explore their own emotions **to draw out their true personas. Tori's complexity can be seen as well as felt through these pages.**

Roper's passion is best expressed in his fantasy art. In this month's gatefold, Tori is both an angel in anguish and a vision of a tiger created by man following the extinction of the species. According to his official website, www.leroyroper.com, Leroy Roper feels that if we put a human face on nature, we will be less likely to destroy the planet.



log on... get smart!

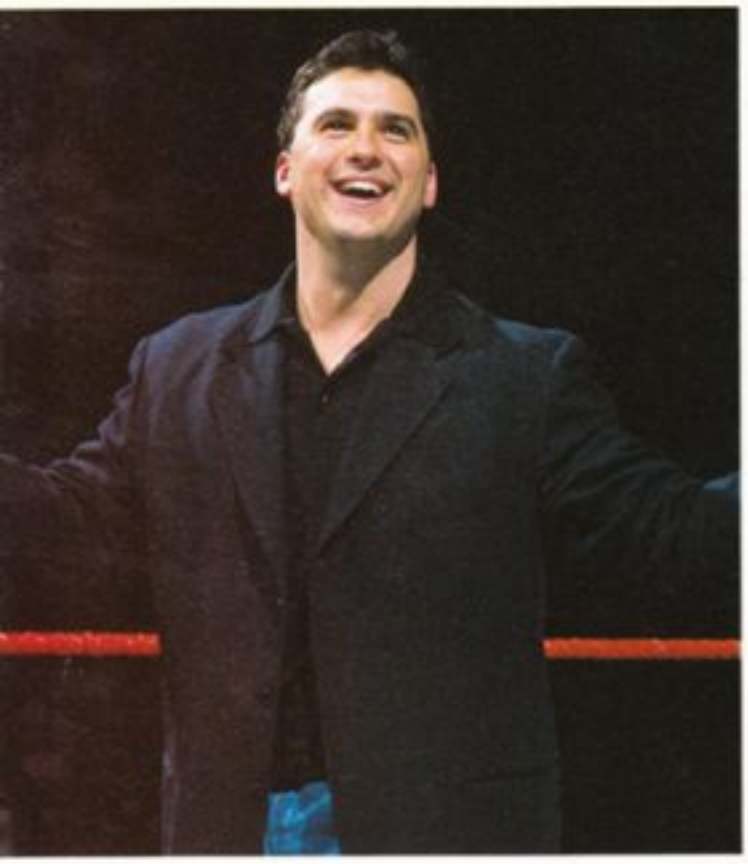
by bill banks

When the television was introduced at the 1939 World's Fair in New York, most critics wrote off the invention as simply a fad that would never amount to anything. Within a decade, however, many American homes had one and people often congregated on city streets to watch their favorite programs on sets in store windows. Without television, film footage of events such as man's first step on the moon, President Kennedy's assassination and images of the Vietnam War would not have shaped our lives.

Sixty years later, we are on the horizon of a new era—one in which computers will take us to brave new worlds never even imagined. The storefront window has been replaced by Microsoft Windows and Internet access is impacting every aspect of our lives. Thanks to the World Wide Web, we can communicate with anyone halfway around the world without a telephone, shop from the comfort of home or access information without going to a library. With computer technology continually evolving, business and industry will be changed in unfathomable ways. In recent years the World Wrestling Federation has also welcomed the computer age with open arms—creating one of the most flourishing sites at wwf.com and its many sister sites.

In the September 1998 issue of *Raw Magazine*, Managing Editor Kevin Kelly penned an article detailing some of the ways the Internet has already changed the Federation. In that article, Kelly posed the question: Will the Web ultimately lead to the demise of the wrestling business? In this writer's opinion—no. In fact, it could very well be the future of the industry! Once considered a universe filled with a minority of *smart* wrestling fans, it is now one of the most important tools molding the business. Once the only way to gauge the masses' response to the product was to sit in arenas. Now, Federation officials can obtain instant feedback from fans via the Internet community.

If a particular idea receives a negative response from chat rooms or message boards, chances are the story line is changed or scrapped. Need proof? Look no further than the persona "Dr. Death" Steve Williams was to assume earlier this year after returning from a leg injury. After witnessing the former Oklahoma Sooner under the guise of a Japanese mask, Federation officials took note of the Internet fans' disapproval and changed course.



(Left) With Shane McMahon's vision, wwf.com is preparing for the future of sports-entertainment.

Likewise, the Web has helped various superstars gain prominence as well. Thanks to massive support of the online community, Mick Foley's stock skyrocketed in 1998.

The immediacy with which the Web offers information allows fans on the other side of the monitor to access results of shows as they happen. At every event, some ticket holders in the audience can be seen with cell phones in hand relaying the details of matches to someone else transcribing them onto a web page. Fans today have an insatiable appetite for new graphics, options and photos on the web site, which has resulted in the Federation producing quicker and better story lines. Lengthy feuds, once a mainstay of the sport, don't necessarily work anymore. Those that do, such as Stone Cold vs. Mr. McMahon, must constantly take the audience through unexpected twists and turns.

Perhaps no better measuring stick for the influence of the Internet on the business is Vince McMahon and his creative team—who rarely go a week without reading the fans' comments. In production meetings following every *HEAT*, *RAW* and Pay-Per-View, one of the first things on the chairman's agenda is to discuss the reaction from the Internet. According to Ed Ferrara, who works behind the scenes as a member of McMahon's creative team, staying ahead of the Internet is a constant challenge.

"We know we're doing our jobs if we can keep the online fans on their toes," Ferrara told *Raw Magazine* recently.

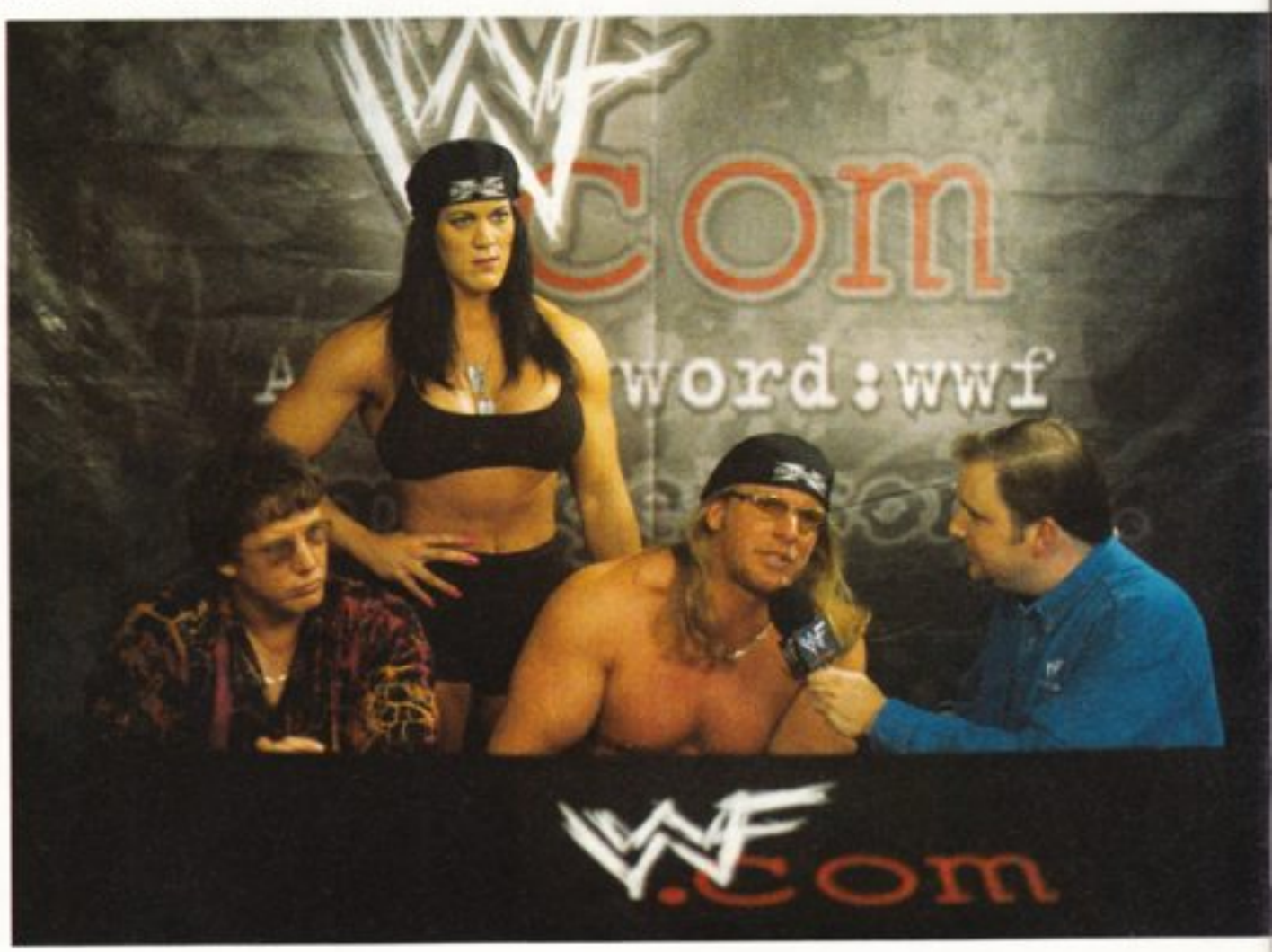
"We realize they can figure out the direction of some story lines, but the important element is surprising them. If rumors get out there—whether accurate or inaccurate—we try to give them something they wouldn't expect. Even if [the fans] have figured out a piece of the puzzle we may still go in that direction, but we always make sure that's just a small part of the big picture."

More than ever before, the way that administrators in this business respect the Internet, from both creative and television production standpoints, continues to grow. Program Manager for Multimedia at Microsoft, Dan Adam, foresees a day when television and the Web will be merged. Many entertainment companies, including the Federation, are preparing for the future through a partnership with Adam and Microsoft.

"As the Internet becomes a faster cable medium and you get more viewers per program, you're going to find the people who make decisions will say, 'Oh, we have to start paying attention to programming in this area,'" Adam told *Raw Magazine*.

"I think it's a case of the old guy versus the new guy... but they're going to come around. It's going to happen. It's inevitable. If you ignore it, you're basically going to be putting more plugs in the holes in your boat. Eventually, your boat will float away and some other guy will come along and take over your business."

Does anyone still think Internet feedback doesn't shape the business? Look no further than Stone Cold Steve Austin, The Rock or Mankind the morning following an event. These



athletes are just a few in a long list of superstars who rely on fans' comments to develop their personas. When the practice of typing out reactions to the shows began in 1996, the Texas Rattlesnake was among the first to seek out wwf.com staff in order to gauge the reaction to his previous night's performance. Like clockwork Austin would ask, "So, what did they think?" and a copy would be in his hands in seconds. Like the proverbial domino effect, the copier doesn't stop running in the production office as the number of superstars following Austin's lead increases.

With a little research, one can gather reaction on wwf.com pertaining to almost every aspect of the Federation. In many instances, this type of open forum has prompted debates on topics that often never make it to television. When several Internet writers criticized the Federation for its new, mature direction recently, *World Wrestling Federation Raw Magazine* Editor-in-Chief Vince Russo and Kevin Kelly tackled the issue head on through a series of columns on wwf.com.

Another area where the Federation is evolving on the World Wide Web is through a series of net casts, which are a distinct, new form of television programming. Microsoft is currently developing new technology that could in all likelihood enable the World Wrestling Federation to pioneer Pay-Per-Views on the Internet!

According to Dan Adam, Microsoft is "just around the corner" from delivering television quality signals on the Web. Adam adds that the possibility is there for interactive Pay-Per-Views to perhaps become a more fulfilling experience than cable! This is not to say that wwf.com is pulling the rug out from under the television division. Rather, a cooperative effort between the two departments will result in increased success for the entire company.

In the past year, the quality of Internet broadcasts such as wwf.com's backstage shows (left) has improved tremendously. (Right) Who's that guy with wwf.com's own Lucas?

Such a breakthrough will no doubt help many fans around the globe who right now may not be able to see the latest Federation action for up to two weeks after it airs in the United States. It would also help news travel faster to such countries, already a proven success.

Recently, wwf.com made controversial waves on the Web by choosing to break the news of Mick Foley's winning the Federation Championship at a December *RAW* taping. Various other Internet sites were enraged over being scooped, while others were shocked that the Federation opted to release the result of a match not yet broadcast.

On the Monday night that Foley's victory was to air, WCW's Tony Schiavone told fans not to bother watching *RAW* and proceeded to read off the outcome of the contest. Little did Schiavone realize that wwf.com had already alerted fans seven days earlier! Needless to say, a then record number of viewers were so intrigued that they tuned in to *RAW* to witness the crowning. The decision to disclose Foley's win from a taped show wasn't a ratings ploy. Rather it came straight from President of New Media Shane McMahon, who knew that holding back such information was an insult to the intelligence of the fans on the Internet.

In many ways this is how television changed the face of the world—through a series of technological breakthroughs. Today, with the 21st century on the horizon, the Internet is following a similar path. How far will it take the World Wrestling Federation? The answer is bounded only by the limits of our own imaginations!

In the meantime, one question: As Vince McMahon established the World Wrestling Federation on Pay-Per-View, could Shane be the innovator of *WrestleMania* on the Net some day? The possibility is already there. ■

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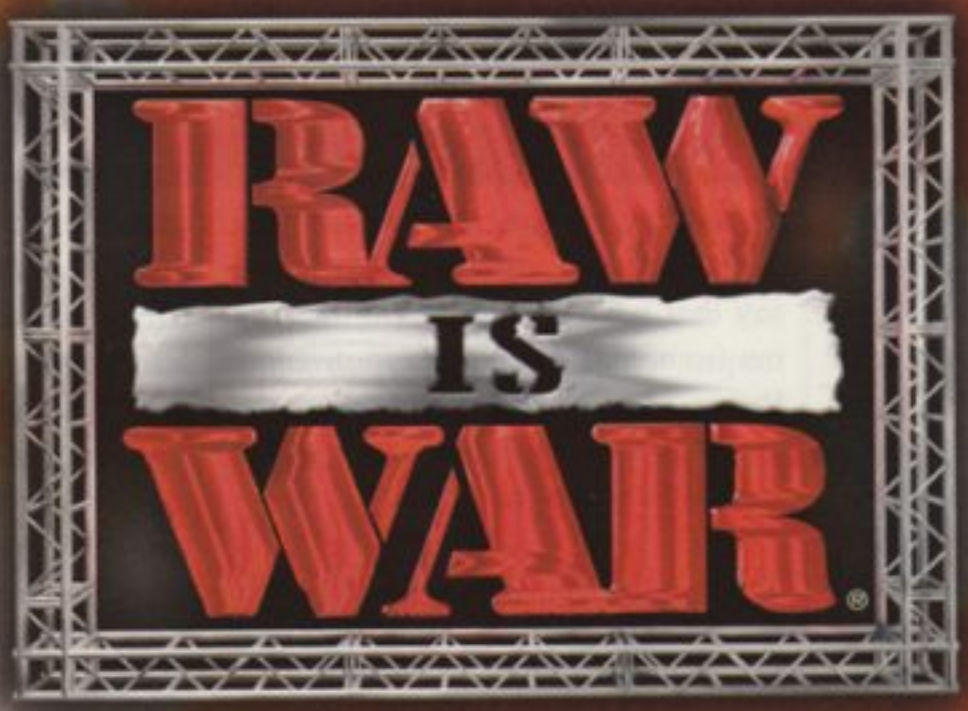

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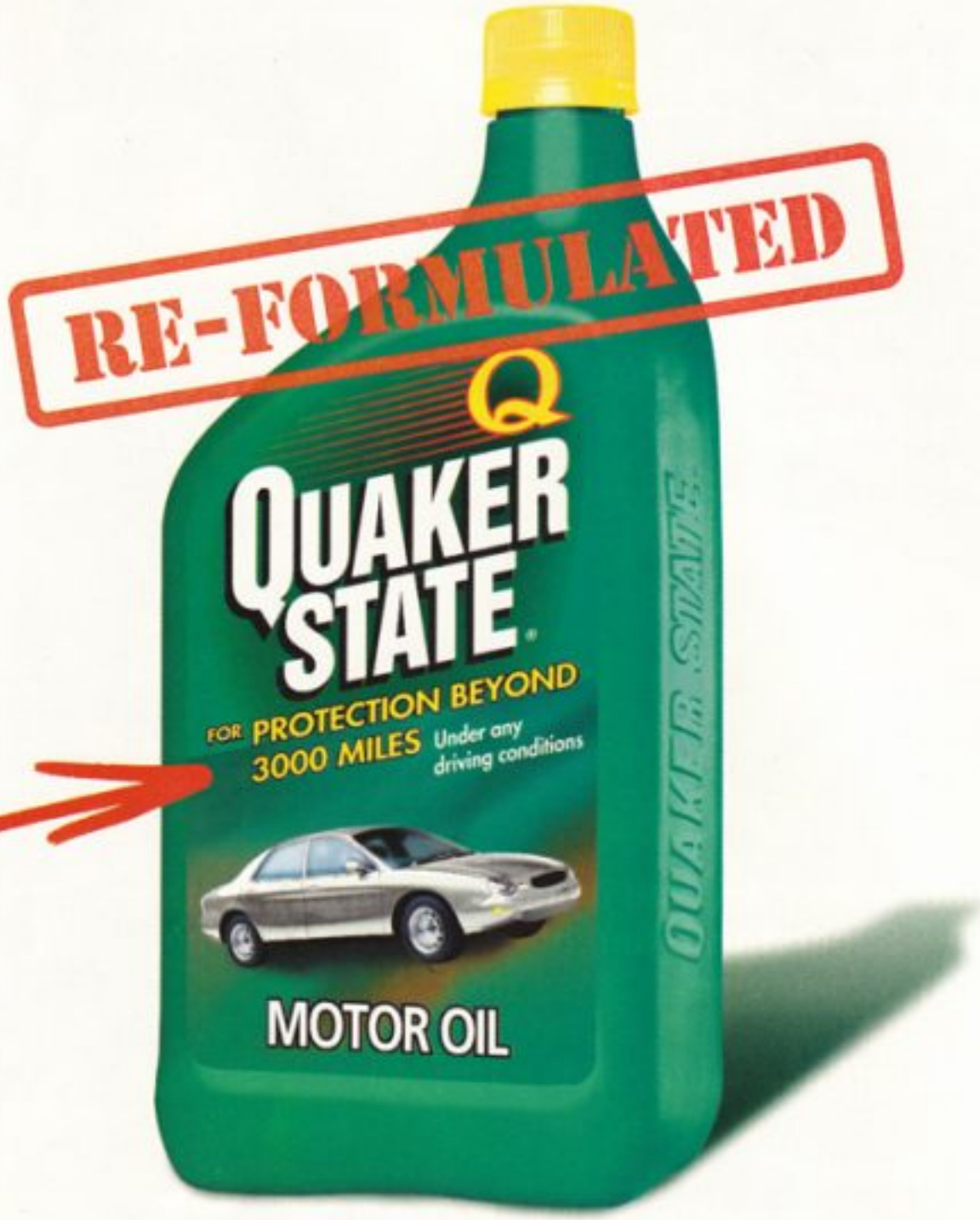

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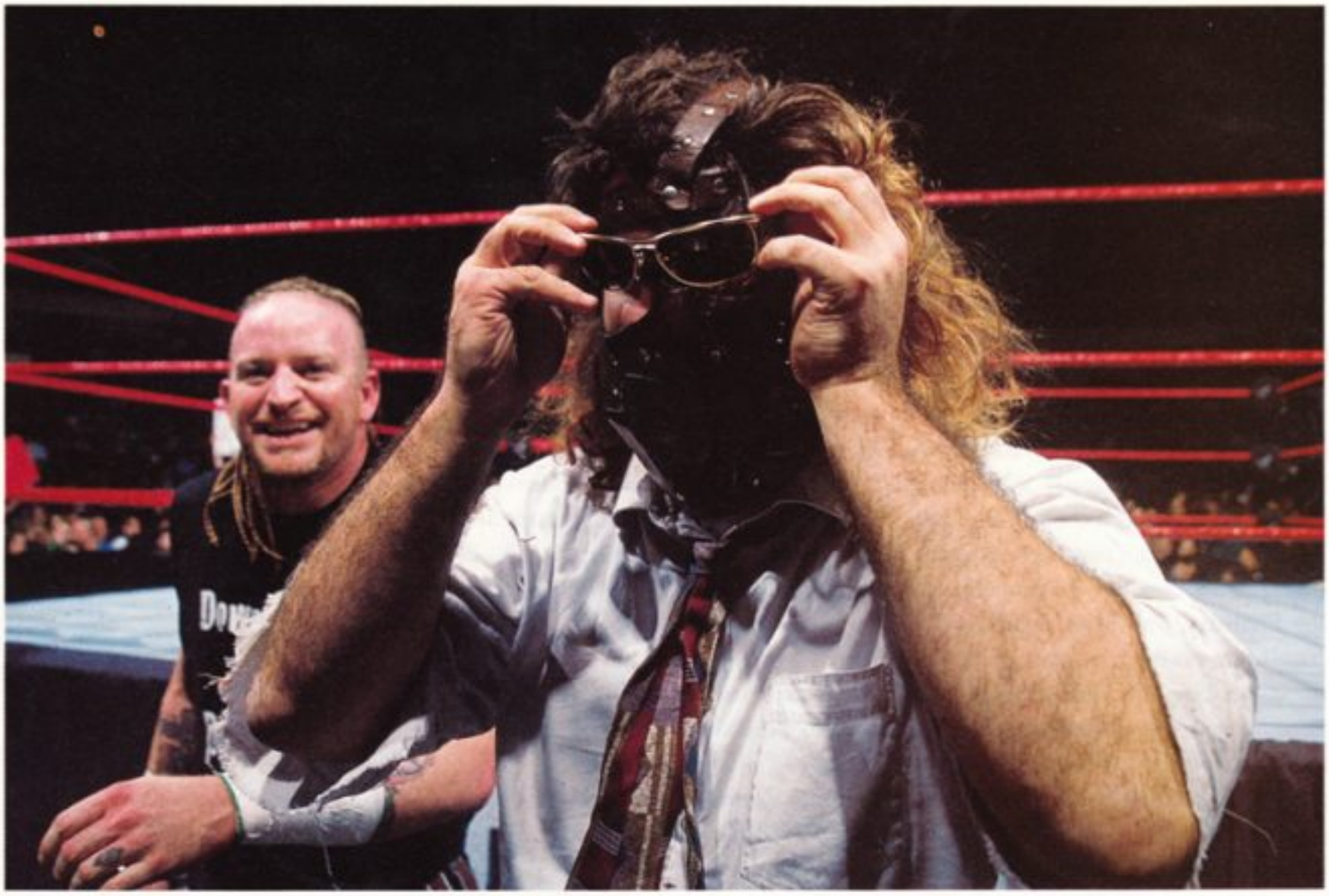


Prime Ribbers

by Bill Banks

***SOME OF THE** names have been omitted to protect the guilty. For fear of retribution, many of those interviewed declined to comment on the matter, while others pleaded that their stories be excluded entirely.*

Although the stories you are about to read may be somewhat unusual, there is nothing illegal about them. In fact, many victims never report such conduct to the authorities... and in some cases these misdemeanors are actually encouraged. Even while doing research for the article, this writer had to take careful precautions not to become a casualty of the process.

What you will learn about is commonly known as "ribbing," a long and storied tradition of practical joking. This practice goes well beyond whoopie cushions, as the Federation Superstars involved take great pride in one of their favorite pastimes outside of the squared circle.

When this writer first heard the term "rib," it was in reference to a joke played on World Wrestling Federation owner Vince McMahon in late 1995 on *RAW*. While Mr. McMahon was in a meeting, one of his employees locked several pigs in the chairman's arena office. Upon his return the owner found something resembling Old McDonald's Farm. According to various sources, the culprit was Titan Sports' Vice President of Event Operations and long-time Federation employee Steve Taylor, who is said to have been very proud of pulling off the stunt. Another gag played on Vince McMahon occurred in 1998 when, prior to a birthday celebration for the owner backstage during *RAW*, someone enscribed the letters "DX" on his cake.

Taylor is no stranger to being the victim of a gag. He shared an experience during his rookie year with the company in 1984 at the hands of noted

ribber, Mr. Fuji, during a 15-day tour of Kuwait. Prior to the trip, fellow employees had warned Taylor of Fuji's infamous ribs. The newcomer was cautioned so much that by the time he met the Japanese superstar, he was completely paranoid that he would be his next victim.

Taylor recalled that on the first day Fuji looked at him, laughed and shook his head. Of course, Steve was sure something devious was in store for him! When Taylor would sit down to eat, Fuji would eye his food intently. When Steve would walk through the airport, Fuji would follow him. This routine continued over the next two weeks until... on the final day, Fuji approached Taylor, patted him on the back and asked, "So Steve-san, how you like rib?" The rookie responded, "What rib?" To which the manager replied, "The rib where you mess your pants 15 days straight."

Ribs played on Federation officials are rare, with the majority performed by superstars on their fellow athletes. This behavior may seem childish to outsiders of the business, but according to several personalities contacted for this story, such actions are in fact a necessity in the sport. While the life of a superstar may seem glamorous to the average fan, extended hours on the road away from loved ones tend to become tedious. In order to break the monotony, the superstars keep themselves entertained through practical jokes. The more effort and creativity put into executing a rib, the longer it is referred to as a "classic" in the business.

Late Hall of Famer Andre the Giant was regarded as a great ribber, and Marty Jannetty was known to raise some hell in his day. The former Rocker was allegedly to blame when hundreds of live mice—intended as dinner for Jake Roberts' snake—got loose in an arena. Obviously, Federation officials were none too happy when they received a hefty extermination bill! Other anecdotes passed down about Marty include the time he allegedly turned off the lights in the arena during a live event while two superstars were running the ropes, and the occasion when he "borrowed" a Hertz bus from a rental car agency and drove his fellow superstars to the airport. Keep in mind that these stories, although not validated, were reported by two prominent backstage officials.

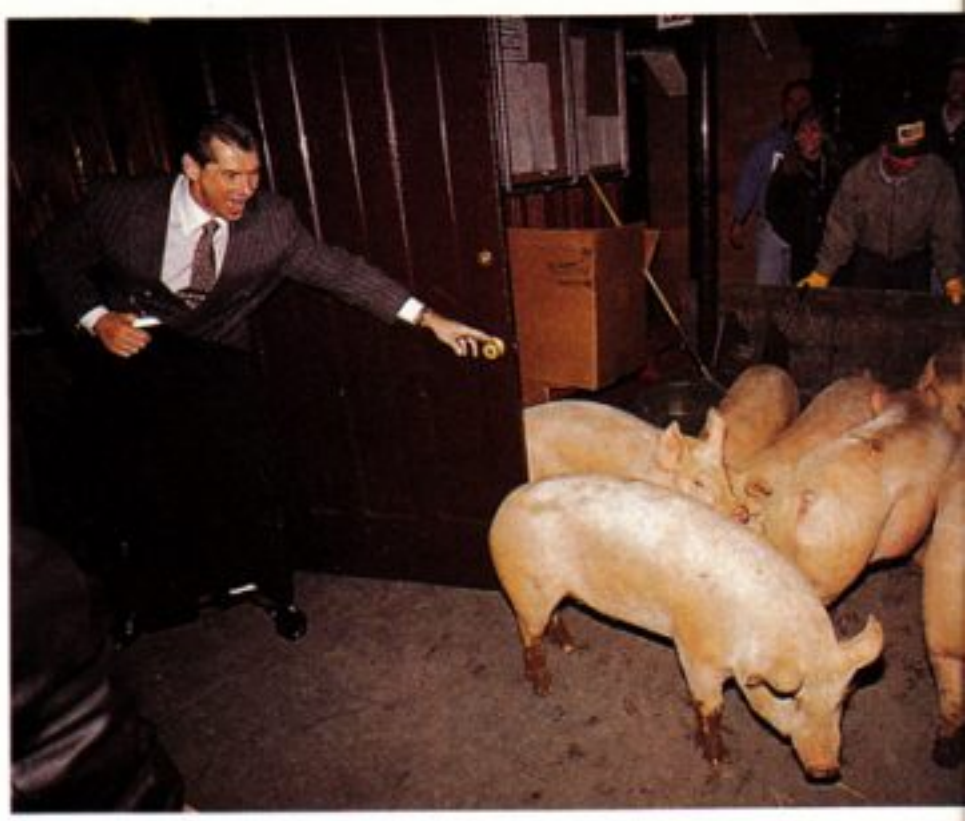
To this day, superstars still talk about the "old timers" who would trick rookies by taking them deer hunting. Prior to the trip, the prankster would harness a stuffed buck—preferably as ominous looking as possible—to a tree. When the hunters "happened upon" the prey the excited rookie, assuming that he'd bagged his first prized trophy, would discover he was the butt of an elaborate scheme.

One humorous gag played on Mick Foley was enjoyed by the entire roster recently. During his feud with The Rock, Mick shared an idea with several superstars about going to a local bakery and playing off The Rock's favorite catch phrase, "Know Your Role," by having Mr. Socko educate Foley about the different types of deli rolls (e.g., pumpernickel, rye, etc.). Hatching the perfect plan, Al Snow beat his comrade to the punch and had cameras follow him to tape a similar scenario with Head. Later, the same superstars excitedly told Foley that Al had produced a video Mick just "had to see." After viewing the tape of Snow stealing his thunder, Mick realized he had been the victim of a classic rib!

Ribs aren't always intended to be innocent. In some instances they are designed to prove a point to someone deemed deserving of such action for several reasons. According to a former Federation Tag Team Champion, there are two types of ribs. One kind is intended to be laughable, such as tying a comrade's clothes in knots or changing his seat on a plane, while others are intended to "set someone straight."

For example, when Mark Henry first entered the World Wrestling Federation some of his fellow superstars labeled him brash and cocky. In one instance, prior to the 1996 *Survivor Series*, Henry competed against Triple H, Goldust and Crush in a tug-of-war on *RAW*. The former Olympic contender got off to a bad start with his fellow competitors when, after suffering a beating at the end of the contest, Henry complained to Federation officials that his opponents had "kicked him too hard." While recuperating from a leg injury, several culprits stole "Sexual Chocolate's" crutches, resulting in some frantic searches for the superstar. Other superstars "borrowed" his cell phone and made expensive long-distance calls all around the globe. The ribs worked and Henry ultimately earned the respect of his peers.

Mr. McMahon had a farm... E-I-E-I-O! On returning to his arena office, Vince discovered that some "swine" had corralled several hogs there.



Those athletes who tend to stay problematic in the locker room will most likely find themselves on the

receiving end of more ribs intended as a wake-up call to a perceived attitude problem. If they don't adjust their ways, the ribs continue. In another recent example, a superstar who was considered arrogant by fellow athletes found himself constantly dressing in his rental car to escape the disapproval of his peers.

Keep in mind such extreme cases are not the norm. The current group of Federation Superstars is considered to be one of the closest knit rosters in history, and ribbing is becoming less frequent. Several superstars confided that they fear being the brunt of any kind of a rib and in fact are happy that such practical joking has died down in recent years; while others claim to stick to their own Golden Rule—they don't rib and they don't want to be ribbed.

One reason for this, in the words of some longtime superstars, is the recent influx of young talent to the Federation. According to these veterans—who endured years of ribbing coming up through independent promotions where the routine is considered a growth process—today's newcomers haven't experienced the practice. The purpose of a rib is as a kind of rite of passage for newcomers in the sport. The more ribs they take part in, the more stories they can pass down to others later. Some say that the fear today comes from hearing of classic ribs from peers and dreading the same could happen to them. This theory was perhaps proven during the course of my interview about ribs when several superstars claimed they would "get back to me" and proceeded to get as far away as possible.

"I think some newcomers today don't understand ribs," one superstar suggested. "I think they envision guys today like the 'Dojo Master' who can do some great ribs, and they don't want to give him any ideas." [Editor's note: The Dojo Master is a particular superstar—who shall remain nameless—who is also a master ribber and in no way connected with the Federation's "Funkin' Dojo" training camp.]

The superstar went on to say: "I think they don't know how to talk about it because they really never had it done to them. But, sooner or later, they realize ribs give them a chance to go through different experiences in the business."

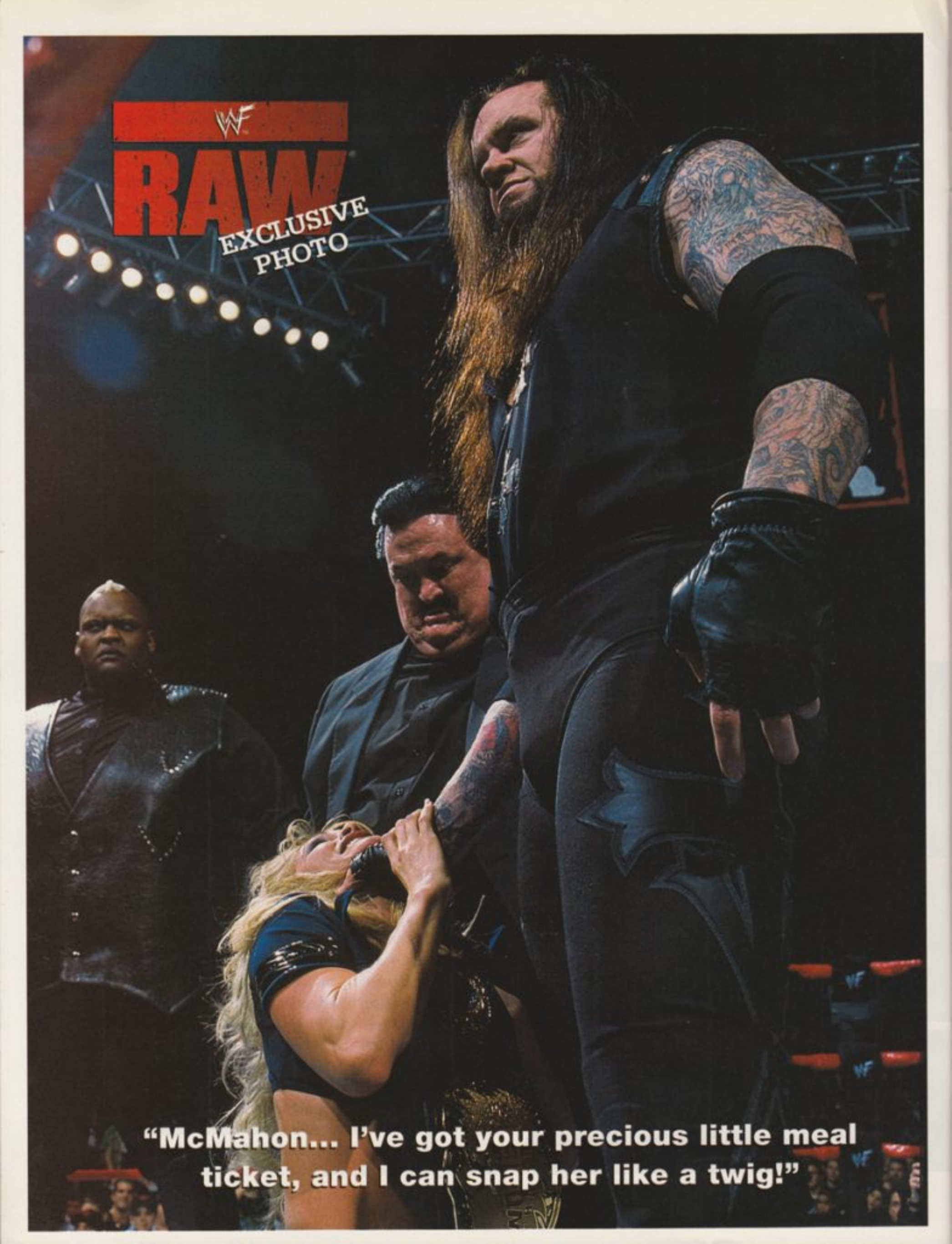
In recent years, several Federation newcomers have gone through their own rites of passage via ribbing. For example, one story offered for this article involved Edge and a night of social drinking. Despite being well over the legal drinking age, the superstar does not drink alcohol. As part of his initiation, he was asked to join fellow superstars after hours for some adult beverages. As he was not driving and had no prior commitments, the Brood member had no excuse not to go along. And if he hadn't, it might have reflected badly on him. Edge eventually proved himself by hanging in for the whole night.

A Federation Superstar who is often fingered as a prime ribber is Bradshaw, who always denies all knowledge or any hand in such practices. When boots are found Crazy-Glued to the locker room ceiling or luggage is "misplaced," the tough Texan is usually the first suspect. According to one announcer, Bradshaw is also known for his love of "erratic driving." In some instances, superstars behind the wheel of their cars have experienced an occasional love tap from Bradshaw's bumper. As with any rib, the Texan's sole purpose is to make life on the road a little more enjoyable.

In just a few hours spent with several superstars, dozens of ribbing stories involving a number of current and former superstars were revealed. Fall asleep during a plane flight and you might wake up without an eyebrow! While driving a rental car, that funny smell might be manure strategically placed under the hood. Can't open that briefcase? Chances are someone changed the combination when no one was looking. If the keys don't fit in the car door it might mean the rest of the day spent picking a broken toothpick out of the lock!

Some of the superstars said I was treading on shaky ground by writing about this touchy subject. Others warned that I was opening myself up to becoming the next victim of a rib. So, if you see this rookie at the next Federation live event with a bald head, shaved eyebrows and walking barefoot with one pant leg missing in search of my lost luggage... rest assured that the tradition continues. ■

Mark Henry's constant tug-of-war with fellow superstars in his rookie year resulted in a number of pranks played on the former Olympic weightlifter.



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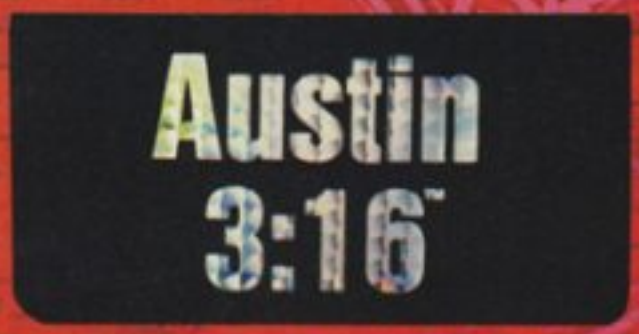

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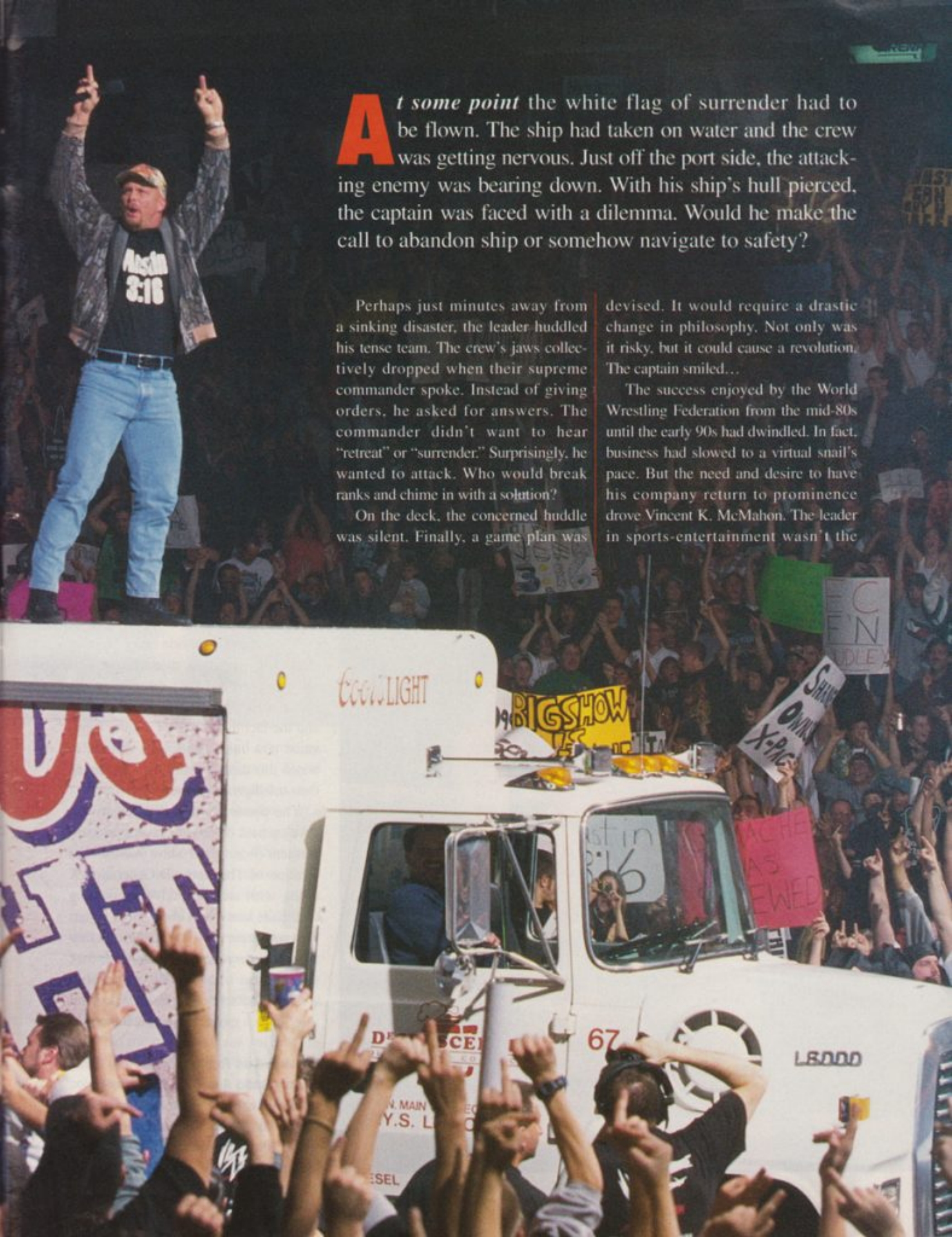
It Was Time For a Change

By Kevin Kelly



At some point the white flag of surrender had to be flown. The ship had taken on water and the crew was getting nervous. Just off the port side, the attacking enemy was bearing down. With his ship's hull pierced, the captain was faced with a dilemma. Would he make the call to abandon ship or somehow navigate to safety?

Perhaps just minutes away from a sinking disaster, the leader huddled his tense team. The crew's jaws collectively dropped when their supreme commander spoke. Instead of giving orders, he asked for answers. The commander didn't want to hear "retreat" or "surrender." Surprisingly, he wanted to attack. Who would break ranks and chime in with a solution?

On the deck, the concerned huddle was silent. Finally, a game plan was devised. It would require a drastic change in philosophy. Not only was it risky, but it could cause a revolution. The captain smiled...

The success enjoyed by the World Wrestling Federation from the mid-80s until the early 90s had dwindled. In fact, business had slowed to a virtual snail's pace. But the need and desire to have his company return to prominence drove Vincent K. McMahon. The leader in sports-entertainment wasn't the

leader any longer. The war with World Championship Wrestling (WCW) changed the landscape of the battle.

The most painful part for Mr. McMahon had to be that a conglomerate, which had bought all the talent he had created, was now beating him. His creative forces remained the same, however, and the same type of programming was being produced each week. The difference was that now a notable lack of star power made the effort seem hollow.

Another change that had not been foreseen was the fans' apparent boredom with the traditional wrestling match. Fans have been fans forever and seeing the same outcomes to the same matches with second-tier stars had them turning away in droves. The lowest point occurred on April 14, 1997.

It was to have been the most ambitious *Raw* broadcast ever. Covering three continents, the show contained matches from the United States and South Africa and an interview segment from Kuwait. Two teams of announcers called this well-produced show. It looked good, but content was sorely lacking. The pace of the show was as sluggish as a child dressing for church.

The evening began with a tag team match between the Legion of Doom and the Godwinns. The match went on and on and on, through one commercial break and into a second lengthy segment. The predictable outcome left the live audience flat and the television viewer reaching for the remote. Why watch the same old stuff when familiar faces and names were doing cool stuff on another channel?

Each segment wore on—every match as predictable and transparent as the one before. The Honky Tonk Man was going to be unveiling his protege the following Sunday. Nobody cared when he announced it and nobody cared when Rockabilly came out at that event. Billy Gunn has since said that it was the lowest point in his career. The Rockabilly character came and went very quickly.

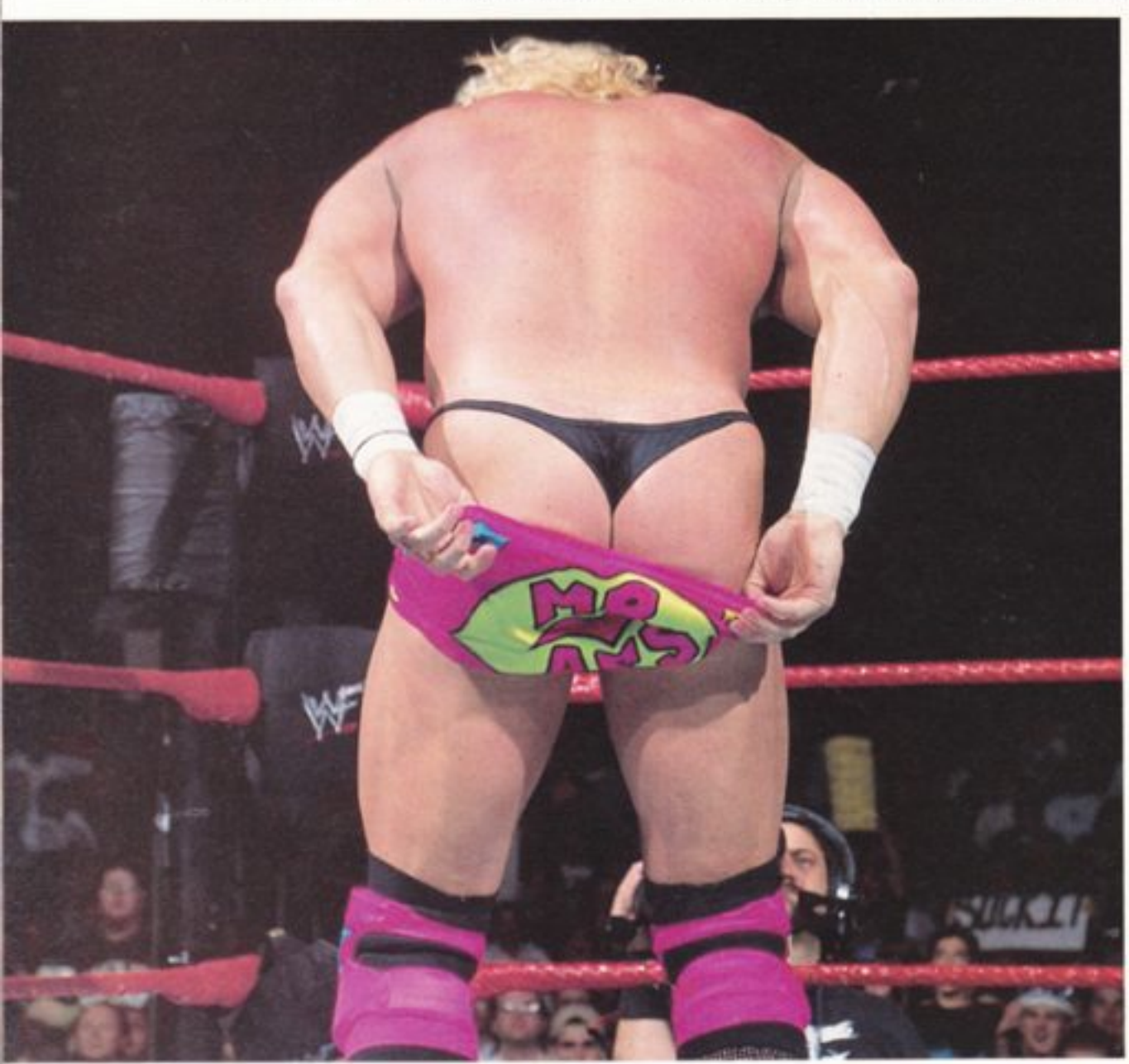
Watching the videotape of the show while researching this article was even torturous. It was tough for Vince McMahon as well. The next day everything would change. He'd had enough. The following morning McMahon called a meeting of all the members of the creative team. For too long, McMahon had been told to hold back the good stuff. He told them that the time to unveil it was now.

Pulling the trigger on a new philosophy for a company more than half a century old is almost unheard of, but Vince McMahon has reinvented himself and his company several times. Usually when a company restructures or changes midstream, a slew of executive heads roll along with the old way of doing things. While McMahon warned that anyone on board would be welcome to step aside, the creative team refocused, readjusted and decided to "get it."

The roller coaster ride every Monday started to gain new momentum. Not only did faithful fans return, but the stunning images, outlandish behavior and the fact that it wasn't rasslin' captivated new fans. It allowed viewers to watch this unique genre without having their intelligence insulted.

The product was enhanced by the development of new characters to complement Stone Cold Steve Austin. The creation of The Rock, D-Generation X along with an impressive supporting cast made fans forget about those names who had departed. They now had a new crop of Federation Superstars with rock star personas who were larger than life.

The "old school" called it "hotshotting," which means taking six months of



Unveiled as Rockabilly in April 1997, today Badd Ass Billy Gunn (left) shakes, rattles and rolls something else! Mr. McMahon's character (right) is dripping with "Attitude," thanks to an occasional beer bath.

a territory's story lines and cramming them into a month or two. Done sparingly, the practice increased houses and hopefully created new interest in a promotion that might be languishing. What the World Wrestling Federation was doing, according to the "old school", would kill the business—run it into a brick wall. The rule of thumb during the territory days was that every period of "hotshotting" was followed by a downturn. The longer the hotshotting lasted, the longer and deeper the cooling off period would be.

What the old school saw as hotshotting, McMahon's crew considered creative writing. Why can't we come up with new stories every week? Shorter matches mean shorter rivalries and more story line turnover. Keep a fresh product on the shelves and people will always come back for more.

Linchpin stars such as Stone Cold and the Undertaker give the writers a firm foundation to begin writing on every week. Throw Mr. McMahon's character into the mix and now we have a story. Surround the owner with a Corporation and now we have rivalry. With everything branching out from the two main superstars, an episodic drama is the way to appropriately describe the modern World Wrestling Federation.

With the new plan of attack implemented, the captain turned about the once sinking ship and began lobbing offensive salvos at the hard-charging foe. While not all struck the intended target, some were direct hits that slowed the attacker's assault, after which the captain was able to repair his leaky hull and fortify his fighting forces.

The commander now had a superior fighting force and a winning strategy. Some older officers grumbled among themselves that it wouldn't work, but they knew that mutinous talk would earn them the privilege of walking the plank. Once the plan began to succeed, the doubting rabble was quieted.

Just when everything appeared the most bleak, the captain and his creative crew were able to turn the tide of battle and force the enemy to retreat. Standing on the deck, the skilled navigator peered out across the horizon and spied his once vibrant enemy reduced to making the same mistakes he once had.

Those who do not learn from history are destined to repeat it. This captain knows he will never make those mistakes again. ■

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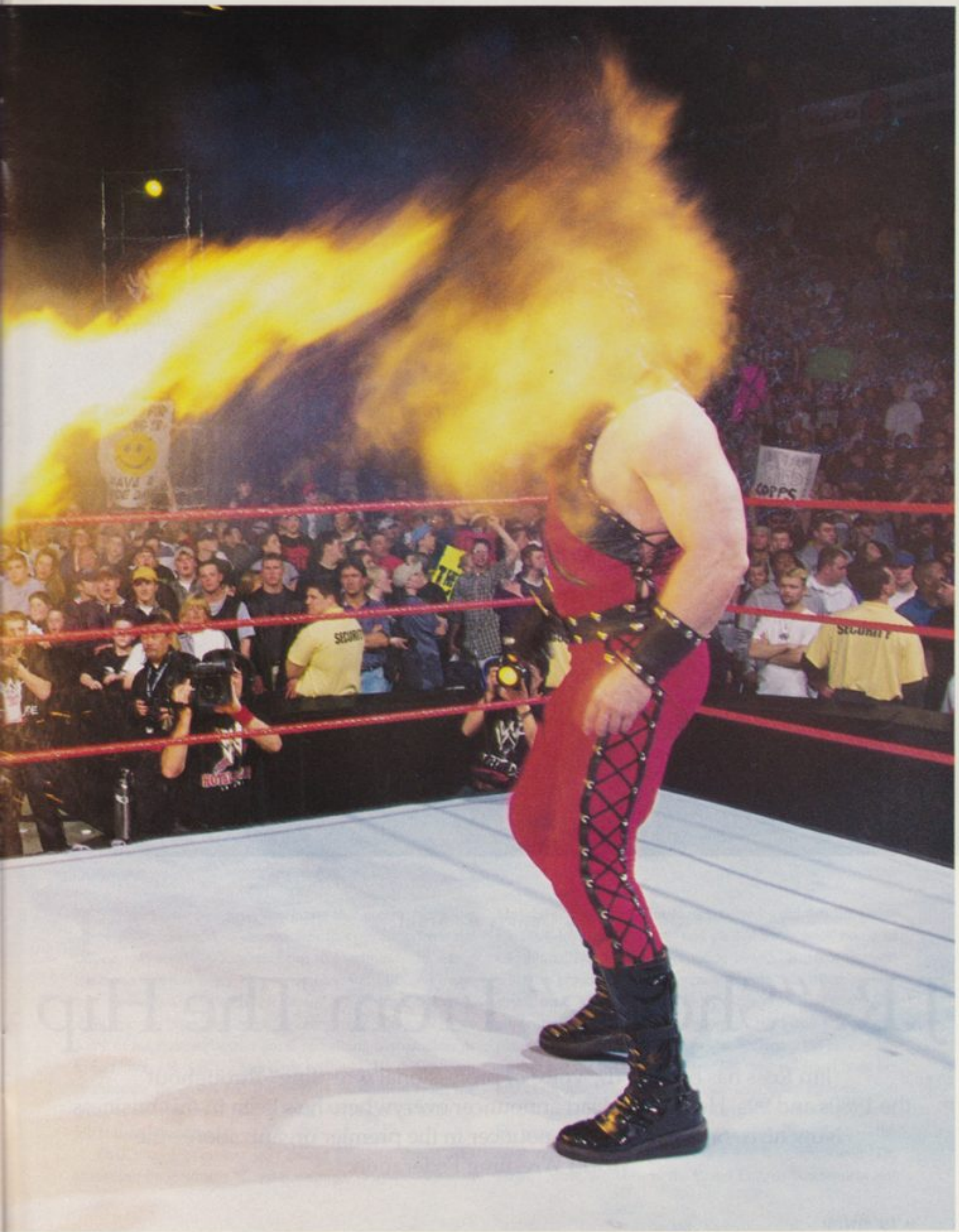
Well, Doc, lately I've been having this burning sensation...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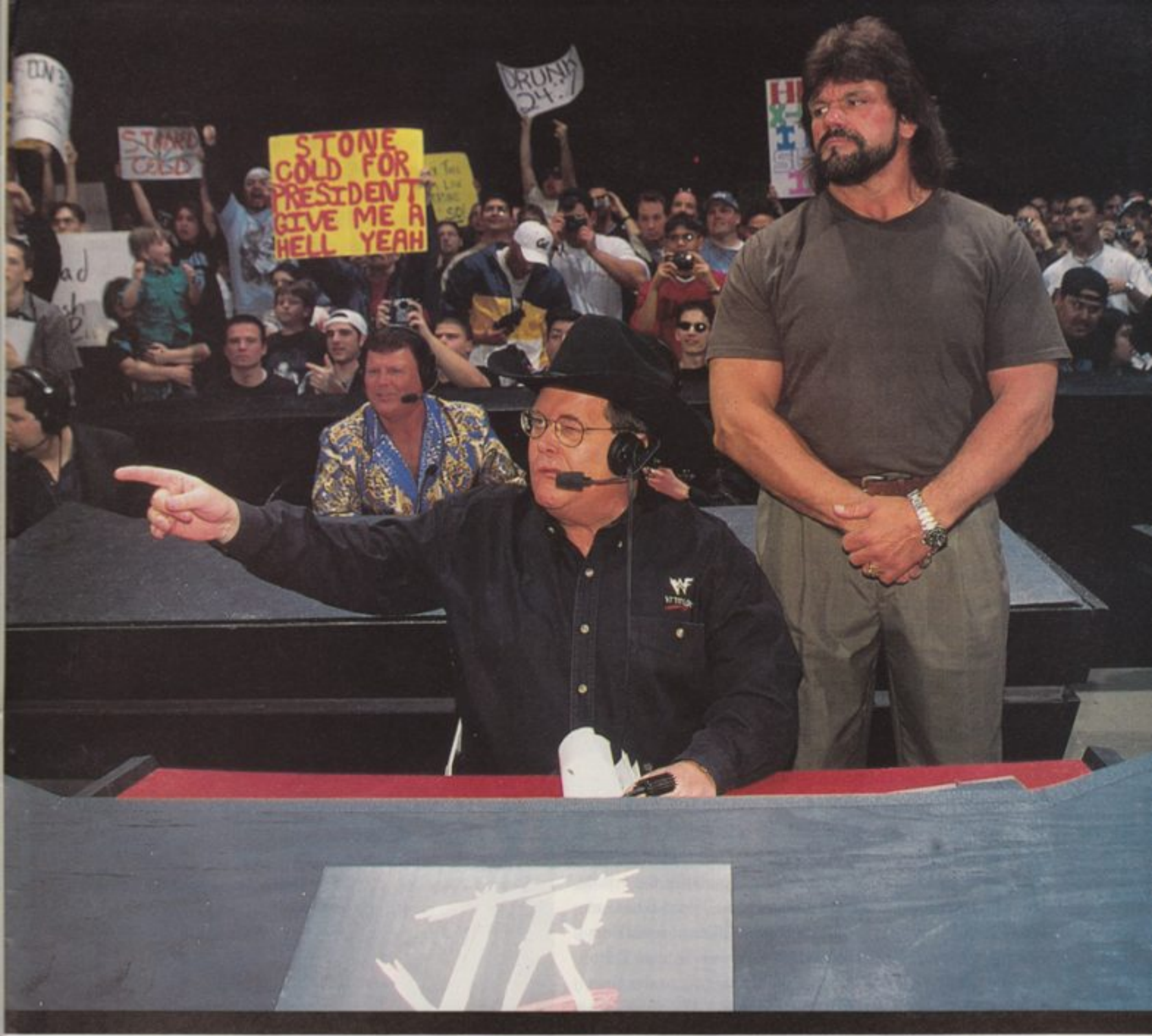
SECURITY

by Dennis A. Brent

J.R. "Shoots" From The Hip

Jim Ross has been THE "voice of professional wrestling" throughout the 1980s and 90s. He was the lead announcer everywhere he's been in this business. Now he is, or was, the top announcer in the premier organization—the World Wrestling Federation.



Everywhere Jim Ross has gone, like cream, his skills have risen him to the top. Jim Ross is considered the most credible announcer in the business—he has a good mix of knowledge, humor, announcing skills and a real love of the business itself. He is not a shameless huckster, shilling every broadcast as the "greatest night in our sport" as some of his contemporaries do. If something is shameless or in bad taste, J.R. will tell you what he thinks. He does his job to promote the event and transfer the excitement from the arena to everybody watching at home, but his ability to do his job is being threatened.

This past December just hours prior to the World Wrestling Federation's "Capital Carnage" Pay-Per-View in Manchester, England, Jim Ross received word that his greatest fan—his dear mother—had passed away back home in Oklahoma. Despite the devastating news, J.R. went through with the broadcast but suffered a terrible fate when he was struck once more by Bell's Palsy during the final hour. The ailment afflicted Ross once before in 1994 and this time it paralyzed the right side of his face. Suffering the loss of his mother and the pain of the illness J.R. was sidelined from his role as the number-one play-by-play man in the business.

On a recent *RAW* from Cleveland, Ohio, Jim Ross made his return to Monday nights to interview Bart Gunn—the same superstar who knocked out J.R.'s longtime friend "Dr. Death" Steve Williams in the Brawl For All Tournament last

fall. Seething with resentment Ross voiced his true feelings about Gunn, as well as countless other Federation employees who had supposedly mocked him and kept him off camera. Since then, in the opinion of some people, J.R.'s actions have been "questionable" in his attempts to regain his position. Is this the same old J.R. we've come to appreciate? Should Jim Ross be allowed to return to the broadcast booth? These are the questions many people are asking.

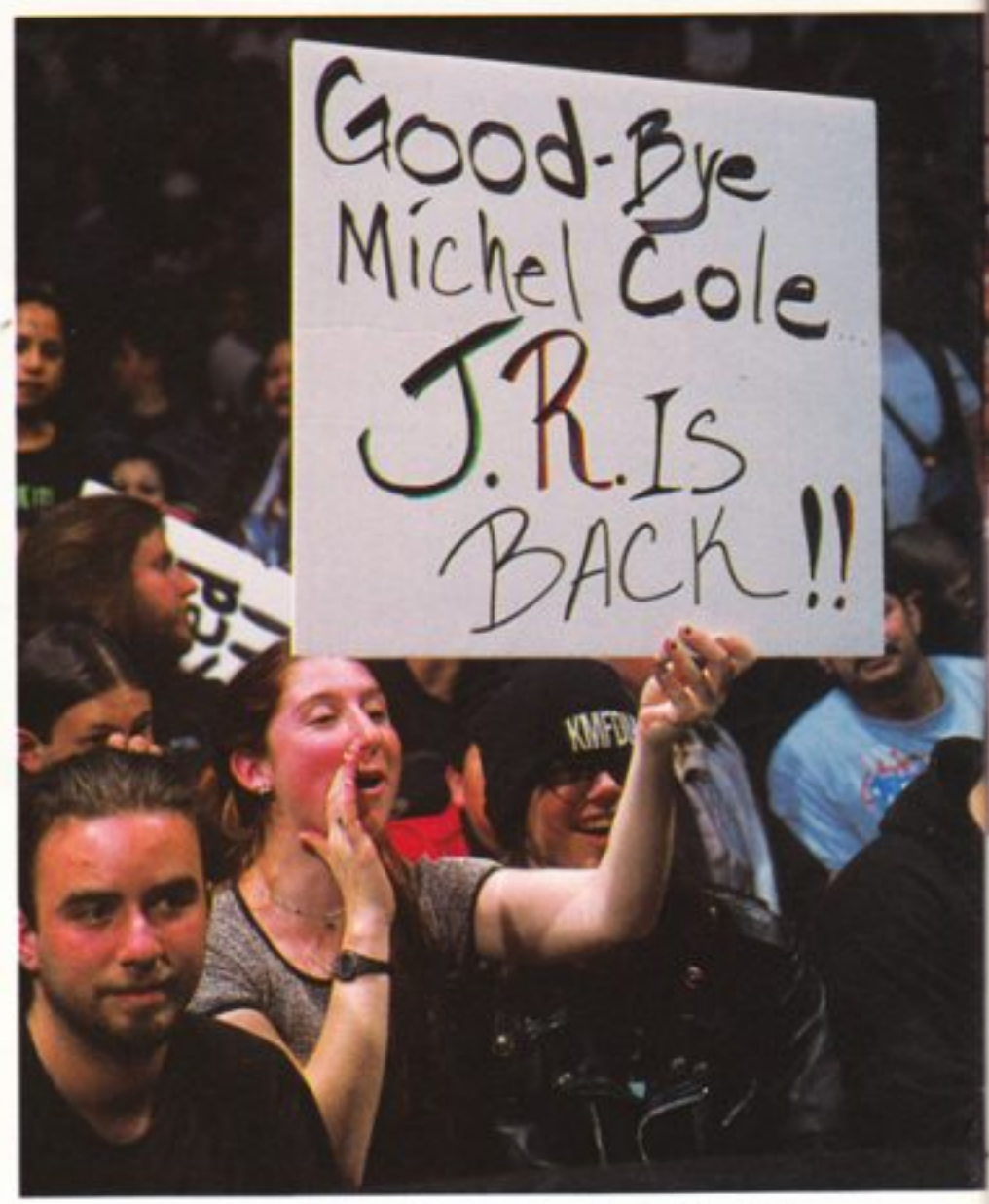
A lot of fans are probably wondering what is happening with good ol' J.R.? What has transformed the Jim Ross we have all known for so many years into the individual who slapped Bart Gunn, kicked Michael Cole and did other things that the old J.R. would never have done? Let me tell you that J.R. hasn't really changed regardless of these actions. He's very sincere about his actions and his profession.

Jim told me recently, "You have to understand the effects of constantly being made to feel sub-standard, always being told that you have the wrong look and the wrong accent can really wear on a guy. I heard it in Atlanta from a guy named Bischoff who was not even qualified to make that call. And now this [the Bell's Palsy]... Again, I will put my work up against anyone's and if they kick my ass doing play-by-play, then they should have my job... For the record, Michael Cole is not a bad human being; however, he was put into an unfortunate position by the geniuses at the World Wrestling Federation television department. Wrong place, wrong time, Michael."

"I had intended to do an interview with Bart Gunn about his Brawl For All match against Butterbean at *WrestleMania*," J.R. continued. "If you watched the tape back, though, you can see that Bart Gunn just refused to look me in the eye. That's very insulting. Knowing the whole story, perhaps you can see my point of view. When Bart Gunn was scheduled to fight Dr. Death Steve Williams in the Brawl For All, I got a phone call from Bart, saying, 'I hope I don't get any heat on me for knocking out your boy in the Brawl For All.' I kind of laughed it off. I said, 'If you're Hoss enough to get it done, more power to you. You better bring a lunch because it ain't going to be easy.' Now, certainly, anybody who has been in any degree of athletic competition knows you can't win all the time. The toughest street fighter, the best football player... very few times do we look and say, 'This individual never lost.'"

Ross further explained: "Certainly, Dr. Death has lost a few street fights in his lifetime. He lost a few times in the amateur [wrestling] ranks at Oklahoma University. Still, he's a documented four-time wrestling All-American. So, I took that for what it was worth and moved on about my business. However, after Doc was knocked out in the Brawl For All—and I would like to add... if you go back and look at that tape—you'd see in the first two rounds that Doc was ahead on points. Then he ruptured his hamstring in the second round and essentially fought the third round on one leg. He should have thrown a towel in, but that's not Doc's style. Anyway, he got knocked out. Was it a lucky punch? It certainly can't be considered luck when a guy gets crippled.

"Then the phone calls continued from Bart Gunn. He wanted to know when the World Wrestling Federation was going to make him a *Star*. That was an issue with which I had a problem. But maybe the most damning scenario of Bart Gunn was the fact that I was told by very reliable sources that he was making a laughing stock out of me. He was rubbing my face in it by telling all the boys in the locker room that he knocked out 'J.R.'s boy.' For me, it was a very depressing situation with which to deal. So, there's a lot more to the story than was talked about on television. That's my point. It's very personal. To this day, it is very personal. The biggest mistake I made was that I got too personal on national television. I want to establish the fact that I have a very positive relationship with Dr. Death Steve Williams. I probably have known him better than any other wrestler on the Federation's talent roster. That's not to say that I don't have a good relationship with other athletes on this talent roster. It just so happens that



Dr. Death and I have a solid, long-term relationship. I knew Doc when he was a junior in college at O.U. What is wrong with having long-term friends?

Ross continued: "In this business, it sometimes seems that when you have friends—especially in my position in the front office here at the Federation—the fact that Doc is on the

talent roster, we aren't supposed to have those relationships. Those sorts of relationships are really scrutinized by the industry's hierarchy. I'm not Dr. Death's manager. Am I his advisor? Maybe, unofficially; but I'm his friend. We work for the same company. I have no plans at this time to manage Dr. Death on a full-time basis. That is all contingent upon me returning to ringside on *RAW* and on Pay-Per-Views.

"I thought I was going to go back at the *Royal Rumble*," J.R. lamented. "But the way the news was broken to me was unkindly and very harsh. I should have not been told the night before the event. The excuse I was given as to why I'm not back on the air was because of my facial paralysis from my second bout with Bell's Palsy. I'm very sorry I got sick. I'm very sorry my face has been ravaged with paralysis. I'm getting better. I am doing all I can physically and mentally to heal. All I want to do is go back to work. I want to go back to calling the action, handling the play-by-play and helping to tell these exciting stories on Federation television. I just want the respect to allow me to get back to work and the trust I can get the job done. I would apologize in advance if my appearance offends anybody.

"You know, I've never been a matinee idol nor was I hired to be one. I've always had a Southern drawl. That's my environment. I was raised in Oklahoma where a lot of folks talk like good ol' J.R. I don't consider that to be good, and I don't consider that to be bad. It's just the truth. It is real. I agree that my appearance is a little on the stiff side. I will also agree there are ways of shooting around that, and letting me get back to doing what I love to do—something that a majority of the wrestling fans respect and appreciate me doing as well. So, I don't agree with the World Wrestling Federation. Yes, I have a legitimate gripe with Bart Gunn. Should I have made it public? That's an arguable question. Is J.R. through expressing himself? Absolutely not. I have a lot more to say.

"I think the creative talents at the World Wrestling Federation were getting just a bit too cute with me," J.R. said. "I like to believe I hold a certain amount of respect among the boys, as well as with the fans. To come out and disrespect me like they did with the deal they did with Tiger and that idiot fan was a total travesty. Dr. Death wanted to kill that guy. And he almost did. It could have been very nasty. I can tell you one thing, though... there won't be any more parodies of good ol' J.R."

A poll was conducted by wwf.com on the question of whether J.R. should be allowed to return to his former duties. An overwhelming 100,000-plus votes were recorded at press time, with 98 percent of them saying, "YES, Jim Ross should be allowed to return to his job."

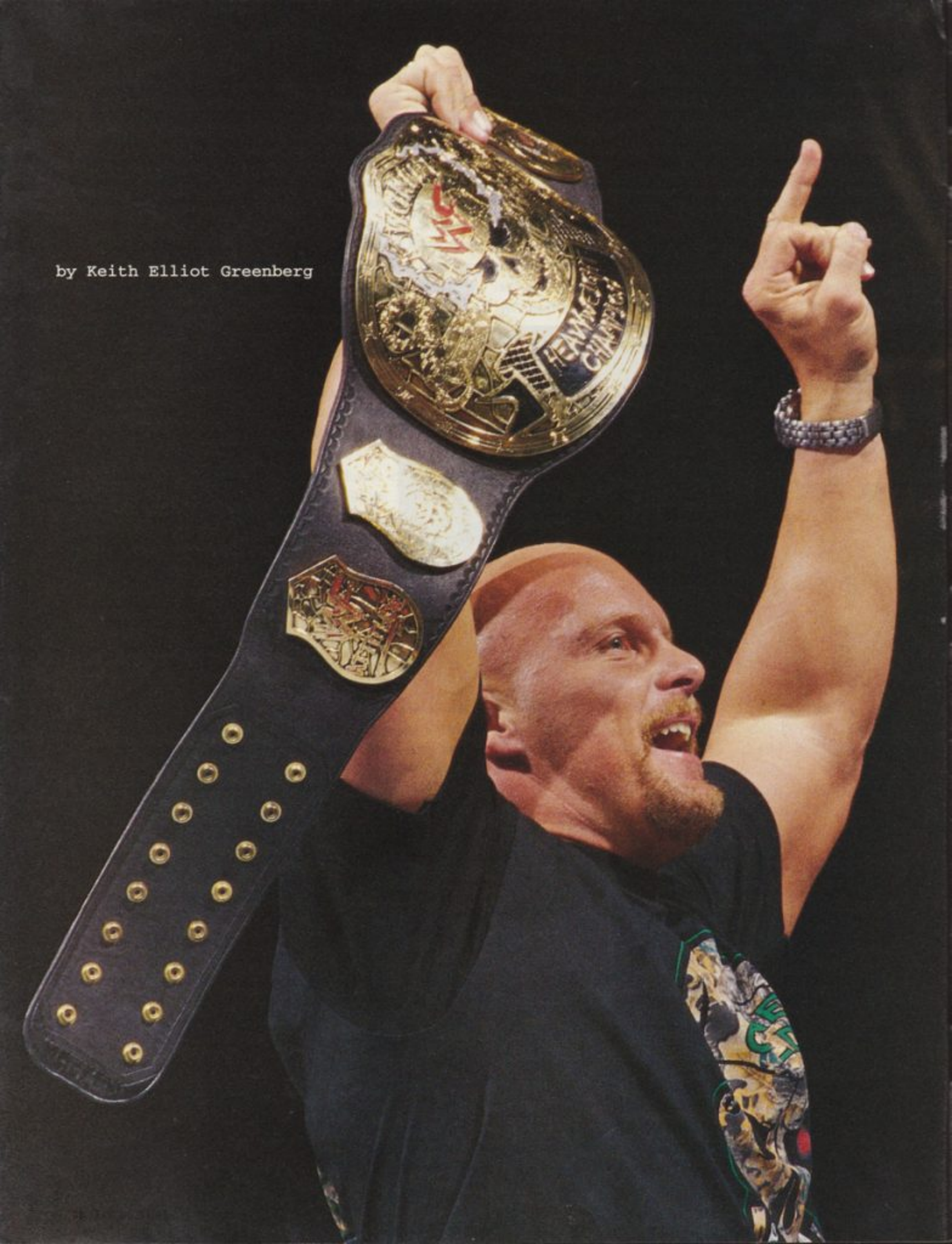
To make his point, J.R. had his own announcing table constructed at ringside during the March 8, 1999, live telecast of *Raw Is War* right in front of the regular table that had "the King" and Michael Cole sitting there. With "Dr. Death" Steve Williams standing guard behind him, J.R. did commentary from *his* table for the rest of the show, at least until Hardcore Holly was thrown onto it and broke it. J.R. invited "the King" to leave his Coach seat and come up to First Class, to come join the "A Team." This was another cut to Michael Cole but these days, who isn't knocking Michael Cole around? But that's another story for another time.

J.R. later told me: "Obviously, I was just trying to make the point that I can do my job. I called the matches and the action just fine. My job is not based on how I look. I know I can do my job.

"I'll just tell you that I'm speaking right from the heart. I want to let you know that I'm ready to come back to work, but basically it's the World Wrestling Federation's decision. I believe I was ready to go back to work in January. Certainly I was ready for February's Pay-Per-View. The marketing geniuses maybe will move my situation up on their list of priorities and address it. I'm ready to go. I hope somebody will listen. I just want to go back to work."

The pace of World Wrestling Federation action moves rapidly from week to week, so at press time I do not know if J.R. has succeeded in regaining his spot on *RAW* or not. I personally hope he has. In my opinion, and many others, there is no one that I'd rather hear call the action at ringside than Jim Ross. I've been listening to J.R. for more than 15 years now and he's the best there is at what he does—period. I want to hear Jim Ross on the air, damn it! Knowing him as I do, Jim has done these things on *RAW* to make his point that he is ready to go back to work. Do I think he is? Yes... I do. ■

by Keith Elliot Greenberg



the making of a Championship:

How The World Wrestling Federation's Belts Are Conceived, Designed and Crafted

When Stone Cold Steve Austin captured the World Wrestling Federation Championship at *WrestleMania* XIV, he announced that there were changes on the horizon. Rather than placating the sponsors by nodding and smiling during interviews, Austin created corporate turmoil by using foul language and chugging "Steveweisers." At personal appearances, he opted for sleeveless T-shirts rather than business attire. And when he entered the ring, the Rattlesnake demanded to have a new belt wrapped around his waist, signifying that the age of complacent champions was over.

"He was very clear about what he wanted," recalls Joe Marshall, 33, the man responsible for making the World Wrestling Federation's Championship belts. "While he respected tradition, Austin wanted the world to know that this was a man with a new attitude."

What Stone Cold may not have realized was that the "suits" he so despised had a similar idea. In fact, for the last two years the World Wrestling Federation has been in the process of overhauling the designs of its championship belts to better fit an organization on the crest of a wave crashing into the 21st century.

"A lot has changed in the last few years," says Debbie Bonnanzio, Vice President of Creative Services for Titan Sports. "For a long time the championship belts, by and large, looked the same. Then we introduced the European and light heavyweight titles and it made us rethink the way all the belts looked. We wanted something modern but classy."

The shift in philosophy has the Creative Services Department, which designs most of the World Wrestling Federation's merchandise, agonizing over alterations to the most coveted prizes in the sport of kings.

"Before we begin designing a belt, we do a lot of research," Ms. Bonnanzio explains. "We have pictures of belts from Japan, from Mexico, from differ-

ent eras. We might use elements of each to enhance our unique, original creations."

Once concepts are approved by Federation officials, full-color sketches and digital art are passed onto Joe Marshall, who has been making his own belts since he was in his early teens.

"In 1981, when I was about 14, my friend, Steve Boothe, and I were really into watching Georgia Championship Wrestling," Marshall recounts, evoking the name of the now-defunct regional promotion then televised into his pocket of Ohio.

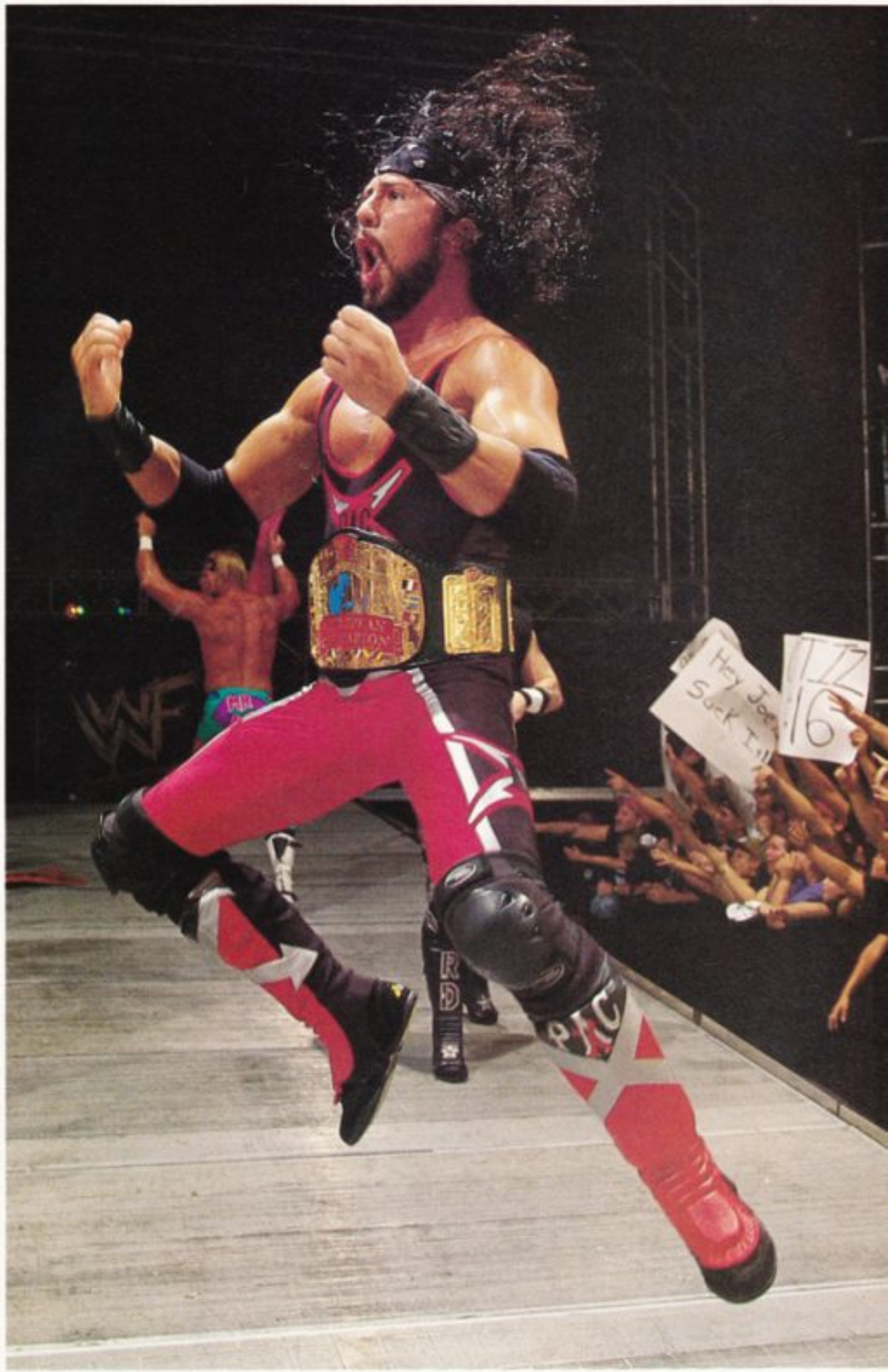
"One day, Steve walks out the door with a cardboard belt with silver foil wrapped around it. With a pen, he'd written 'Georgia.' I guess he wanted people to think he was [Georgia champion] Austin Idol."

In an effort to outdo his friend, Marshall cut out shapes of wrestlers and stapled the pieces to a vinyl strap. In the center he placed a piece of gold-painted cardboard, indicating that he was then–National Wrestling Alliance (NWA) titlist Harley Race. Soon, the teenagers were attending matches at the Ohio Center in Columbus and creating a sensation in the stands by wearing their version of the Georgia tag team belts.

At the age of 16, Marshall graduated to the next level, constructing belts with leather and trophy parts, while investing in a hand engraver to design shapes in the metal center plates of his representations. When a neighbor began wrestling on the independent circuit, Marshall made him a "championship" belt to cart from one high school gymnasium to the next.

By 1994, Marshall's belts could be found at small shows around the mid-western and southern United States. He was now designing the championships on a computer and had switched from trophy metal to a higher grade material. When Dan Severn captured the Ultimate Fighting Championship, it was a Joe Marshall belt that was fastened around his waist. World Championship Wrestling also ordered a U.S. title. Then, in early 1995, the World Wrestling Federation called.

"I was surprised, shocked, extremely excited," Marshall says. "I couldn't believe people in such high places were



The creation of a new championship, such as the recent addition of the Women's Title (left), requires painstaking research. The making of the European gold (right), for instance, incorporated elements of many international titles.

familiar with my work. This wasn't a hobby anymore."

Marshall was well-versed in World Wrestling Federation title history, as well as the way the belts had evolved. "The old belts, before the 70s, were castings made from a mold," he notes. "By the late 70s, though, they were replaced by belts with engraved designs. Bob Backlund [whose first World Wrestling Federation reign lasted from 1978 to 1983] had a belt that was a combination of the two styles, with a three-dimensional wrestler on the front."

In 1984, Hulk Hogan began the first of five World Wrestling Federation title reigns, heralding in a new age. Pop stars mingled with lifetime fans at ringside, and matches were broadcast on MTV. In this environment, the look of the World Wrestling Federation Championship changed. Says Marshall, "It was shinier, more flashy."

Between *WrestleMania* XII and *WrestleMania* XIV, the title changed hands nine times, with Shawn Michaels ruling—on two separate occasions—for a total of 12 months. Insiders call the strap passed around during that period the "Shawn Michaels belt," which was adorned with the old, block-lettered World Wrestling Federation logo, an eagle in the center and bars jutting out from the sides. The night after Steve Austin snared the championship, Federation owner Vince McMahon appeared in the ring, holding a newer version of the championship belt.

"The Shawn Michaels belt, to me, looked too much like a cartoon," Marshall says. "So, I added details like the eagle's body and feathers. Some people think all the World Wrestling Federation Championships should be the same size. But I thought the heavyweight belt should be bigger because no title is more important. So, this was at least 50 percent larger than the Intercontinental Championship."

When Austin spied the new belt, he tossed down the old one and grabbed the creation from Mr. McMahon's hands. He then climbed onto the turnbuckles and raised the strap to the cheering crowd. But within a few months, the Rattlesnake wanted something that better exemplified his personality. Marshall asked a friend, Matt Balk, to come up with a design. The result: a belt with a skull in the center, the World Wrestling Federation "Attitude" logo on the forehead, barbed wire around the edges and a shattered glass look for a background.

"Austin originally wanted a dull silver belt," Marshall says. "But the other belts were gold, and I was afraid this would look weird. So, I made him both gold and silver belts and showed them to him in the dressing room. He liked the silver belt. But when he saw the gold one, he looked at his reflection in the skull and said, 'This is f'n' awesome.'"

Prior to *WrestleMania* XV, Mankind and The Rock spent several months trading another belt—a slick-looking championship with a black strap with precious stones on the sides—back and forth. The center plate was circular, compared to the oval Intercontinental and Women's titles, squared Tag Team and European insignias and a shield in the middle of the Light Heavyweight strap.

As of this writing, the Federation Hardcore Championship consists of an old beat-up belt defaced by tape and spray paint. But even that title is being revised for the turn of the millennium.

Fans often ask Marshall how much a World Wrestling Federation belt is worth.

"It's a question you really can't answer," he says. "Think of it this way. How much would you pay for something that every man in wrestling has fought for, after it's been worn to the ring by a superstar like The Rock or Stone Cold Steve Austin? It's priceless." ■

The Tag Team Title (above) has endured without modification longer than any other Federation Championship. The Intercontinental gold (right) was altered recently to distinguish it from the Heavyweight Championship.

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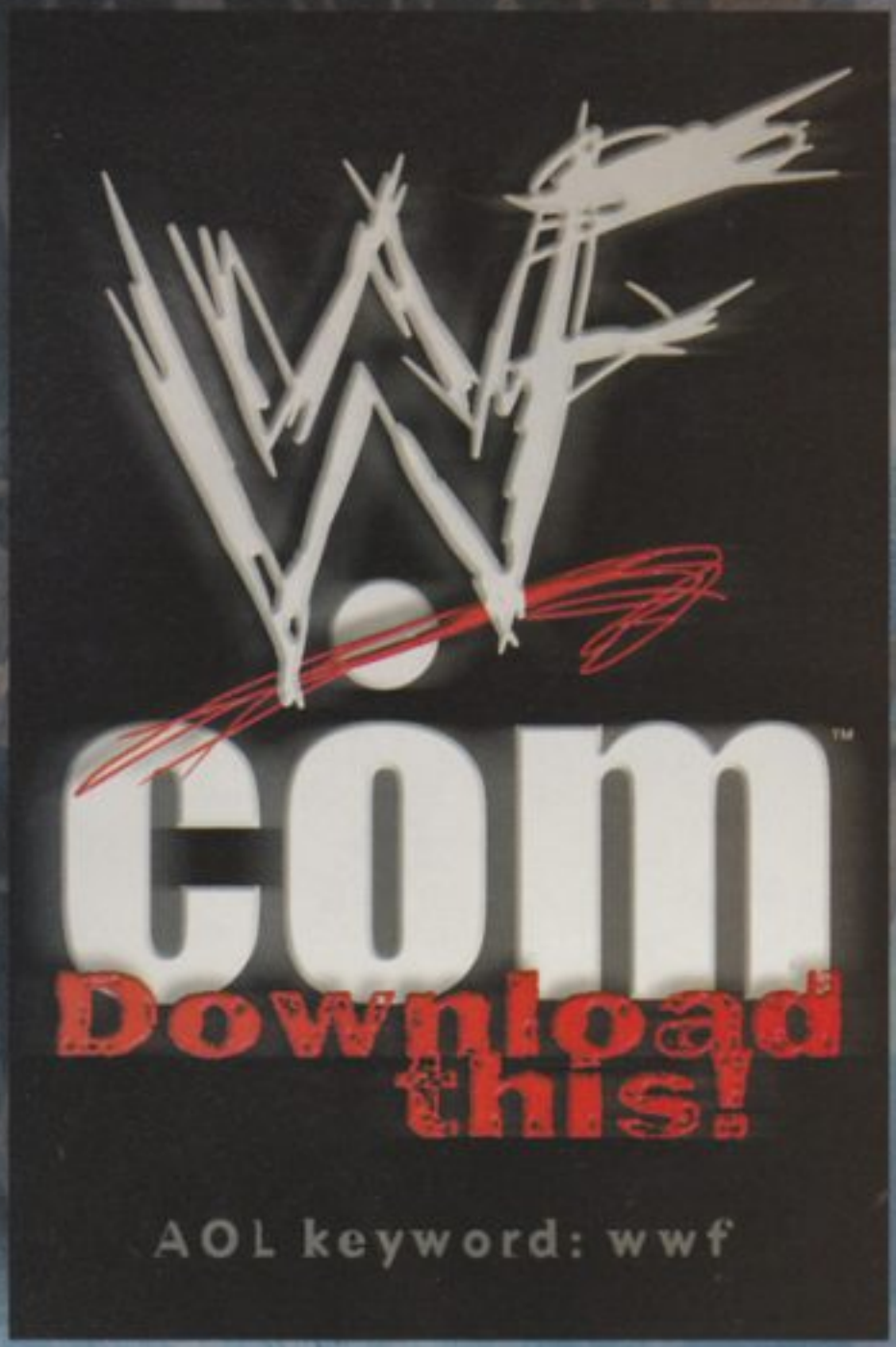

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